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*Menander,
New Comedy and
the Visual*

ANTONIS K. PETRIDES

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MENANDER, NEW COMEDY AND THE VISUAL

This book argues that New Comedy has a far richer performance texture than has previously been recognised. Offering close readings of all the major plays of Menander, it shows how intertextuality – the sustained dialogue of New Comedy performance with the diverse ideological, philosophical, literary and theatrical discourses of contemporary polis culture – is crucial in creating semantic depth and, thus, offsetting the impression that the plots are simplistic love stories with no political or ideological resonances. It also explores how the visual aspect of the plays (*opsis*) is just as important, and just as full of allusive potential, as any verbal means of signification – a phenomenon termed ‘intervisuality’ – examining in particular depth the ways in which the mask can infuse various systems of reference into the play. Masks like the *panchrēstos neaniskos* (the ‘all-perfect youth’), for example, are now full of meaning; thus, with their ideologically marked physiognomies, they can be strong instigators of literary and cultural allusion.

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ANTONIS K. PETRIDES



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NOTE ON THE TEXTS OF MENANDER,
PLAUTUS AND TERENCE

Menander's plays are quoted from the following editions:

Dyskolos: Sandbach (1990)

Aspis: Jacques (1998)

Epitrepontes: Furley (2009)

Kolax: Arnott (1979)

Misoumenos: Arnott (1996b)

Perikeiromene: Arnott (1996b)

Samia: Arnott (2000)

Sikyonioi: Blanchard (2009)

Plautus' plays are quoted from de Melo (2011–13).

Terence's plays are quoted from Barsby (2001).

ABBREVIATIONS

Periodicals in the Bibliography are abbreviated according to the standards of *L'Année philologique*. The names and works of ancient authors are according to *LSJ*.

- K.-A. R. Kassel and C. Austin (eds), *Poetae Comici Graeci*, Berlin and New York, 1983-.
- LIMC *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, Zurich, 1981- .
- LSJ *A Greek-English Lexicon*, compiled by H. G. George Liddell and R. Scott, 9th edn, revised and augmented throughout by Sir H. S. Jones, with the assistance of R. McKenzie *et al.*, Oxford, 1996.
- MIMC² T. B. L. Webster, *Monuments Illustrating Old and Middle Comedy*, 3rd edn, revised and enlarged by J. R. Green, BICS Supplement No. 39, London, 1978.
- MINC³ T. B. L. Webster, *Monuments Illustrating New Comedy*, 3rd edn, revised and enlarged by J. R. Green and A. Seeberg, BICS Supplement No. 50, London, 1995.
- OLD P. G. W. Glare, *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, Oxford, 1982.

INTRODUCTION

At first sight, New Comedy performances are liable to appear conventional and uni-dimensional. They can look like plain and rather shallow romantic fables, along the lines of a 'boy-meets-girl' scenario, deprived of the political engagement and laugh-out-loud quality of Old Comedy. Performatively speaking also, New Comedy could be regarded as a tame show, with common urban stage settings, uncaptivating realistic costumes and little stage hullabaloo; that is, a theatrical performance without the linguistic, visual and musical flamboyance of earlier comic tradition, or the spectacle of contemporary, fourth-century tragedy, which made imaginative use of lavish dress, impressive masks, stage machinery, rhetorical pyrotechnics and other means to set up an engrossing event. In effect, even to the eyes of many scholars today, New Comedy seems like a denuded genre, whose sole interest lay in the sensitive depiction of social reality and human nature.

In fact, it is the impression, not the genre, that is skin-deep. The common motif of the five chapters that constitute this book is that New Comedy has a far richer and more sophisticated performance texture than transpires from the script. A fuller appreciation of New Comedy can be achieved if one moves towards a pragmatic approach to performance analysis, which repositions theatre semiotics 'in the communicative process',¹ that is, in the productive and receptive context of the real-time event that is the theatre,

¹ For a sophisticated theoretical approach to theatre semiotics from a pragmatic point of view, see de Marinis (1993). De Marinis singles out three areas of focus: '(a) the relationship of *the text to its sources*, which emphasizes the dynamics of enunciation and communicative intentionality; (b) the question of the *text's relationship to other texts*, where the issues of context and intertextual practices are brought into play; and (c) the relationship of *the text to its receiver*, which includes the act of reading and interpretation' (emphasis in original) (p. 3).

taking into account the dynamics of contextuality, intertextuality and audience reception.

Intertextuality – the sustained dialogue of New Comedy performance with a diverse range of ideological, philosophical, literary and theatrical discourses of the democratic polis – plays a most crucial role, I argue, in creating semantic depth and perspective on stage, and in checking the reductive impression of Menander as a mere ‘mirror of life’. It is explored initially in [Chapter 1](#), which lays the basic theoretical foundations, chiefly as regards New Comedy’s dialogue with the ‘general text’ of polis culture, as well as with tragic myth and performance. In its ‘inter-visual’ facet it dominates the chapters that follow.

For it is a fundamental tenet of this book that the role of the visual in bringing forth the referentiality, the *density*, of Menander’s performance is paramount, just as important as any verbal means of signification, and without an exact, identifiable fifth-century precedent. New Comedy performances, it is argued, are stratified and thickened in two major ways: first, by way of a triple layering of the plot on the verbal/narrative level through a synergy of realistic, ideological and archetypal narrative strata; and, then, by the new-fangled capacity of *opsis*, the visual aspect of performance, dynamically to infuse various systems of reference into the performance – a phenomenon for which I reserve the term *intervisuality*. New Comedy displays a dense stratigraphy of semantic layers (textual and intertextual, visual and ‘intervisual’, realistic and ideological), which coalesce and cooperate in a composite and erudite mixture, *more hellenistico*.

[Chapter 1](#) attempts to locate the stamp of Menander’s theatrical craft between realistic mimesis and ideology, between fictionality and (inter)textuality. It examines how the limited scope of the romantic love story is expanded, as it resonates with the values of patriarchal civic ideology. It also examines how the realistic façade of Menander’s theatrical narratives is problematised, as it measures itself continuously, and in various lengths, against mythical archetypes, which as a rule had already been the subject matter of tragedy.

The first part of the chapter discusses Menander’s notorious ‘realism’, combining ideology with ‘possible-worlds’ theory to

demonstrate how Menander departs from realism in both senses of this ambiguous word. Menander, it is argued, anchors his stories in a recognisable social milieu (most commonly, Athens of the day), only to leave it far behind, and vocally so, in the ending of the play, where the real problems plaguing the characters find fortuitous, ‘magical’ solutions. With a sleight of hand, Menander’s denouements resolve intractable conflicts and effect unmanageable marital unions, enlarging the narrow confines of social reality into a more inclusive, but ultimately fictional, comic universe. On the face of it, Tyche, acting as the veritable agent of civic ideology, intervenes and transforms historical reality into a place of merriment, cohesion and democratic unity. The crux of the matter, though, is that this transformation is not disguised as being anything other than ‘comic’, and its artificiality is hardly kept unseen. The overall realistic ambience, the very fact that the play begins from a realistic point of departure, and the way it resolves its plot by abandoning verisimilitude so palpably in the end, invites an inescapable comparison between historical reality and its fictional analogue in Menander’s denouements, which invests the latter with a disquieting, bittersweet aftertaste. The profound, strongly accentuated distance between reality and fictionality creates a pregnant sense of comic *unreality* in the denouements of Menander, which, contrary to appearances, is not far removed from Aristophanes. Anything but an unsophisticated mirror of life, Menander oscillates craftily between realistic representation and fictional world-making. The space opened up as the pendulum swings between the two extremes is loaded with subtle humour and ideological gravity.

Therefore, counter-intuitively perhaps, the poetics of fictionality and world-making is most essential for fathoming Menander’s ‘realistic’ drama. The whiff of an intricate theatrical art lurking behind an unfussy exterior is heightened even further, as Menander’s plots prove to radiate from theatrical memory as much as they emulate ‘real life’. Menander’s fictional universe, the second part of [Chapter 1](#) submits, exploits its realistic façade also in order to call attention to the textuality and the theatricality that underpins it. Subtle literary and theatrical artifices, with ample awareness that they operate at the crossroads of *two traditions*,

the comic and the tragic – in fact, that they constitute a singular product of generic hybridisation – Menander’s realistic-looking stories incorporate, apart from the romantic and the ideological, an inalienable third, mythical stratum. To a larger or lesser extent, Menander’s plots ‘urbanise’ (put into an urban context) narrative patterns drawn from tragic myth; in other words, they are not so much mirrors of life, as *mirrors of stories*. As a set of narrative and performative precedents, tragedy for Menander is not an extraneous theatrical mode to be deconstructed, debunked or antagonised (although such traditional comic reactions to tragedy are not entirely lacking), but is an inherent mode, a constituent of New Comic theatrical medium, deeply ingrained in the genome of Menander’s hybrid world. Menander’s spectators – often his characters, too – are constantly aware of the fact that the urban scenario runs on the tracks of tragic exempla, which can either be followed or derailed, but still are always absolutely critical for completing the semantic space of the scene. The romantic kernel of Menander’s plot reflects the anxieties, and the failings, of civic ideology, but also, in a triple over-determination, which enhances the humour and the consistency of the narrative, ‘urbanises’ and ‘secularises’ material known from legend – in a manner that continues and apparently improves upon a practice already established by and large in the period of Middle Comedy.

New Comedy, in a nutshell, far from being a cardboard reflection of contemporary *vita privata*, constitutes an elaborate theatrical construct, which problematises the values of polis culture, all the while looking decidedly towards the Hellenistic poetics of allusion. Just as importantly, as [Chapter 2](#) expounds, performative density in New Comedy is achieved, in a manner unparalleled in fifth-century comic or tragic theatre, thanks to the increased sensitivity of theatrical and extratheatrical audiences, from the fourth century BC and increasingly onwards, to the minutiae of visual representation and to what could be called the politics of the gaze. The fourth century saw a virtual revolution in matters of theatre performance, as theatre was internationalised (exported to the four corners of the Greek world and performed in an ever-increasing number of local festivals); professionalised (theatre practitioners

were now celebrated specialised *technitai*, who soon enough would become unionised to boot); and theorised (reflected upon both in theoretical writings and during the act of making theatre on stage). Not only was theatre good to think about in the fourth century; it was also, as time went by, good to think and act with: theatricality percolated into an increasing spectrum of public functions, not least in Ecclesia and the courts. The immersion of Greek society from the fourth century onwards into a wide array of attentively orchestrated public spectacles – in other words, the constitution of a culture of viewing and of spectators – awakened the average individual to the potent capability of the visual to create meaning even on the micro-level of the human face.

New Comedy performance carries this cultural baggage. By the time of Menander the ‘science’ of Physiognomics, that is, the art of scrutinising the external signs of the body, especially the features of the face, in order to gain insight into the interior of the soul – specifically, to determine a person’s proclivity for virtue or vice (what the ancients called *ēthos*) – is already pervasive. Clearly, Physiognomics was far from ideologically innocent: it encoded and enforced the patriarchal value system of the polis upon the body of the citizen. Of course, as any ideological endeavour, Physiognomics, too, was fraught with the anxiety and the inherent instability dogging any syllogism ἐκ σημείων (rhetorical deductions based on external signs). This instability, I maintain, renders it even more useful as a theatrical code, specifically as an intertextual – actually, *intervisual* – stratum on a novel kind of theatrical mask.

Three processes, which again unfolded in the course of the fourth century, determined the internal development of the comic genre: the aforementioned hybridisation (the creation of a hybrid with tragedy through the absorption of elements from tragedy not only on the level of diction and plot, but also on the level of *opsis*, especially in the arrangement of space and the system of masks); standardisation (the constitution of a limited and concerted system of signs); and semiotisation (to use the terminology of C. S. Pierce, the transformation of formerly ‘iconic’ theatrical signs, for instance, the features of the mask, into ‘indexes’ of disposition by way of Physiognomics). Hybridisation, standardisation and semiotisation

render the visual aspect of New Comedy performance, especially of its two most foregrounded signs, namely, space and the mask, a potential marker of allusion to literary or cultural systems of reference. Chapter 2 deals briefly with the referential capacity of space, as promoted by the extensive confluence of New Comedy with the spatial practices of tragedy, now even more discernible in the permanent stone *skēnē* (stage-building) of the Theatre of Lycurgus, which creates fresh allusive possibilities.

However, it is a prime contention of this book that if the visual element in New Comedy is indeed laden with the potential to evoke intertexts, the mask is protagonistic in this respect. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 delve specifically into the mask and its critical intervisual input in New Comedy performance. The mask, it is argued, whose semiotic gravity is greatly augmented in comparison with the fifth century, should always be acknowledged in the analysis of New Comedy performance, albeit not without methodological caution.

Chapter 3 examines the role of the mask in constructing character on stage, defending the significance of Physiognomics against doubts expressed, most stridently by Joe Park Poe, and attempting to re-situate the perception of the mask and its theatrical function within a Greek frame of analysis, namely, Aristotelian ethics and the critical notions of *ēthos* (proclivity towards virtue or vice), *praxis* (action) and *prohairesis* (the process of moral choice). Chapters 3–5 focus mostly on masks of young men. This is not a random choice. The so-called ‘New Style’ series of New Comedy masks, which surfaced around the time of Menander as shown by the archaeological record, break with Middle Comedy tradition not only thanks to their more delicate physical features and their stylistic kinship with contemporary plastic arts, but also because they emphasise the genera of young boys and girls at the expense of fathers, slaves and courtesans. This was no accident. New Comedy re-invented itself as a genre revolving around the social mechanics of marriage and the civic processes that generate citizens – in the double sense of perpetuating the body politic through legitimate procreation and of seeing an adolescent through a rite of passage

that makes of him a mature adult. It is only natural that the ‘couple in trouble’ and their idealised masks, which, it must be noted, bear close iconographic associations with the respective masks of tragic youths, are foregrounded.

To underscore further the importance of the youth as a citizen *in statu formandi*, New Comedy does away with the tripartite Middle Comedy division distinguishing the masks of free men into masks of ‘young’, ‘younger’ and ‘old’ men, opting to open a large gap of age and status between juvenile ‘sons’ (*neaniskoi*) and declining ‘grandfathers’ (*pappoi*). This innovation is momentous, not least because, according to the Aristotelian ethics that obviously inform the comedy of Menander, these are the two categories of moral agent in whom the prerogatives of adulthood are either lacking or in a state of degeneration. The New Comedy mask of the youth, the chapter argues, is ideally suited – one could say even purposefully designed – to suggest an individual that is not inherently vicious, but is certainly prone to counter-proairetic choices due to *akrasia*, one’s inability to rein in one’s carnal impulses through the exercise of logical control. Thus, the purpose of Chapter 3 is to clarify why and how exactly the physiognomic make-up of the mask is a principal semantic layer of New Comedy *opsis*. Physiognomics cannot, and should not, be dismissed with non-chalance in performance analysis; however, it should be used in accordance with the proper nature and principles of contemporary (fourth-century BC) praxis.

Chapter 4 continues to explore the mechanisms of producing theatrical meaning by the visual means of the mask (*prosōpon*), investigating the dialectic or ‘interfacial’ dimension of the mask. Through the example of the professional soldier interacting with his valet, the chapter qualifies a fundamental datum of structuralist research into masks, namely, that they are not isolated but dialectic signs. Masks determine and transform each other’s signification as they face off syntagmatically on stage, all the while forming a continuum with other signs (proxemic, kinesic, visual, verbal), and also playing against the literary and other narratives that inform them. Nonetheless, expounding on the latter point, the chapter emphasises that the semiotics of the mask in performance

is over-determined: displaying a multiple semantic stratification similar to the plot, the mask's semiosis, carries ideological and anthropological baggage; is the product of juxtaposition to significant antithetical signs of other masks; receives input from other signs, such as, especially in the case of the soldier, the costumes and the props; and is also fundamentally defined by intertextuality. In other words, masks do signify by way of differentials, but what actually constitutes a significant difference on a mask, and how this difference plays out as a theatrical sign, is determined not only by the added value of communal ideology, but also, most importantly, by the interface of the characters on stage (thus, by the involvement of the mask in an ensemble of signs interrelating in real-time), and by the constellation of literary and cultural intertexts that underpin the plot. Thus, the spectator's role in the construction of the mask's semantic field is cardinal, and the whole process of reading the mask 'interfacially' – as an interface of *prosōpa*, but also of actors and spectators – is much more dynamic and fluid, much 'messier', than pure structuralism would allow.

The professional soldier, whose dramatic destiny is to be deflated and debunked, at least in some of his New Comedy manifestations, is a telling case in point. Syntagmatic association with a craftier parasite, most probably wearing the *kolax* mask (Pollux, Comic Mask No. 17), deconstructs and discredits the soldier's physiognomy, which is otherwise disconcertingly 'manly' (a feature Menander takes advantage of in the *Sikyonioides*, to turn the very mask that Plautus, for one, undercuts to Stratonophanes' advantage). The soldier's 'dialogue' with his parasitic flatterer transforms the semiosis of the first *episeistos* ('the wavy-haired youth', Pollux Comic Mask No. 15) utterly. But, as Plautus' *Miles Gloriosus* suggests, the soldier's 'deposition' is also effected, forcefully and conclusively, through a clever intertextual game: in Plautus' play the soldier, who nurses illusions of grandeur, which his parasite is all too happy first to feed and then to debunk, is constantly crash-landed from 'higher' to 'lower' literary paradigms, from the marble pedestal of Homeric epic, for example, to the lowly bleachers of epic parody.

Chapter 5 concludes this book with the case study of the *panchrēstos* (Pollux, Comic Mask No. 10), which synopsis the principal significance of the mask as a polyvalent theatrical tool and a rich marker of allusion. The intervisuality of New Comedy *opsis*, the chapter claims, and the precarious ‘politics of the gaze’ in the context of the fourth-century polis culture are ideally combined on the *panchrēstos*, illustrating the multilayered nature of New Comedy performance and the benefits of a pragmatic approach to theatre semiotics. The attribution of the *panchrēstos* to Menander’s Charisios (*Epitrepontes*) and the two Pamphili of Terence (*Andria*, *Hecyra*) must remain, of course, tentative, although hopefully the argumentation that supports it will convince the reader of its likelihood. As this book repeats more than once, what counts the most is the principle: as long as New Comedy personages play in mask, and since that mask is protagonistic in the construction of *ēthos* and the articulation of stage semantics, the mask, which more than any other sign asserts the vitality of *opsis* in this innovative kind of theatre, cannot but be acknowledged in the analysis of New Comedy performance, even if the particular attributions proposed remain indicative and heuristic.

MENANDER'S NEW COMEDY BETWEEN REALITY AND TEXTUALITY

How 'real' is the realistic?

The impression that New Comedy is a realistic imitation of life, and that this, the authentic representation of social reality, is the genre's essential purpose, seems to have summed up the value of Menander's art for many ancient critics, most of whom lived much later than Menander. The following famous lines by Aristophanes of Byzantium (257–180 BC) constitute the most succinct among many such judgements that have come down to us (test. 83 K.-A.):

ὦ Μένανδρε καὶ βίε
πότερος ἄρ' ὑμῶν πότερον ἀπεμιμήσατο;

O Menander and Life
Which of you two truly imitates the other?

Many more similar quotes survive from various periods. For Quintilian (10.1.69 = test. 101 K.-A.) Menander *omnem vitae imaginem expressit* ('painted a complete picture of life'); and for Manilius (5.470–6 = test. 94 K.-A.), Menander *vitae ostendit vitam chartisque sacrauit* ('showed life to life itself and enshrined it in his writings'), even if his own *urbs* failed to see that properly during his lifetime.¹ A brief look at the Testimonia in the relevant Menandrian volume of the *Poetae Comici Graeci* (vol. VI.2) suffices to show that the ancients were almost invariably fascinated by Menander's detailed accuracy and insightful observation of the world around him.² Menander's comedy was

¹ Manilius is hinting at Menander's supposed lack of success in the Athenian dramatic competitions. For a dissenting modern view, see Konstantakos (2008).

² Some unrepentant Atticists were the most notable (and ultimately fatal) exception to antiquity's adoration of Menander. See, e.g., the notorious test. 119 from Phrynichus (second century AD): 'By Hercules, I really cannot understand what is wrong with those people who think so highly of Menander and raise him above any other writer in Greek literature' (οὐχ ὁρῶ, μὰ τὸν Ἡρακλέα, τί πάσχουσιν οἱ τὸν Μένανδρον μέγαν ἀγοντες καὶ

thought to be brimming with 'realistic' character types, conventional but still individualised, and to present the living conditions of fourth-century Greeks (housing, dressing, socialising, travelling, conducting transactions of various sorts, etc.) in a manner true to life.

There is no question whatsoever that Menander's Athens (or Corinth or any other city in which he places his plots) would not seem alien to the eyes of the contemporary spectator. Although often the topography is sketchy – this is meant, no doubt, to render the performances easily transposable, thus exportable – plays like the *Dyskolos* are very firmly localised.³ Menander's Comedy is anchored in the social spaces and dynamics of the polis, particularly Athens. It echoes the concerns of the polis for crucial matters such as marriage, procreation and inheritance, as well as larger issues like gender and class.⁴ Our testimonia also find realism in Menander's characterisations, as well as in the variety of speech registers displayed on his stage: there are as many such registers as contemporary society might afford, exclaims Dionysius of Halicarnassus (test. 87 K.-A. = Dion. Hal. *Imit.* fr. 6,2, II, p. 207, I Usener-Radermacher), who recommends enthusiastically the study of Menander's ability to relate to real life. The term Dionysius employs here, *to pragmatikon*, must be harking back to such philosophical sources as the *Peri Pathōn* attributed to the Peripatetic Andronicus of Rhodes (also first century BC), where *pragmatikē* is defined as 'the science of human affairs' (ἡ ἐπιστήμη τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων πραγμάτων, p. 574 M.). The road from Aristophanes' fantastical extravaganzas to Menander's down-to-earth urban comedies was, of course, long, with many intermediate stations; eventually, though, Menander, not any other, was the playwright universally considered by the ancients – and by many

αἴροντες ὑπὲρ τὸ ἐλληνικὸν ἄπαν). Interestingly, an almost verbatim echo of Phrynichus' indictment can be found in a late-twentieth-century assessment of Menander (P. Green 1990: 67): 'A contemporary reader may find some difficulty in appreciating the reasons for the high status Menander, for instance, enjoyed throughout antiquity (though not, interestingly, during his lifetime).' On Menander's fates from antiquity till his rediscovery in the sands of Egypt, see Blume (2010).

³ See Lowe (1987).

⁴ See mainly Lape (2004), who calls the polis 'a prior framework' for the comedy of Menander.

moderns – to be the epitome of a theatre representing faithfully and accurately the human condition on stage.

Still, all this undiluted celebration of Menander's representational accuracy and authenticity eventually did the playwright a disservice. For one, it created expectations, which upon his rediscovery in modern times Menander was hard-pressed to meet. If Menander is a mere mirror of life, one cannot honestly fault such detractors as William Tarn, who lambasts Menander's kind of comedy as 'the dreariest desert in literature'. After all, writes Tarn, trenchantly but accurately, 'Life is not entirely composed of seductions and unwanted children, coincidences and recognitions of long-lost daughters, irate fathers and impertinent slaves.'⁵ Indeed it is not; tragic myth is. Peter Green, for his part, may be uncharitable, when he disparages Menander's 'soap-opera plots', 'hackneyed motifs', 'grotesque devices' and 'situational idiocies';⁶ yet in his case, too, one can at least see where he is coming from, if, for all the dexterity in plot construction and all the psychological panache, such artificialities do take centre stage in Menander and it is on them that his plots often rely. It is uncomfortable to admit, but still it is a reality that neither Menander, nor Plautus nor Terence have taken to the modern stage as readily as Aristophanes or the tragedians. Menander can indeed look dry and uninteresting to the unsuspecting modern spectator, who cannot fathom the stratified nature of his performance text, its ideological and intertextual underpinnings, or indeed its subtle play with social reality and the concept of mimesis within the confines of comedy as a genre. Under the simplistic and reductive prism of 'realism' Menander may well look like a charming but ultimately plain and shallow story about lovelorn young bucks overcoming obstacles thrust in their way by grouchy fathers, greedy pimps or unfortunate twists of fate (*tychē*).

Indisputably, Tarn and Green were too quick to throw scorn on Menander, but the problem lies not so much with their conclusions, which one can take with a pinch of salt, as with their theoretical framework, into which, unfortunately, even the

⁵ Tarn and Griffiths (1952: 273).

⁶ P. Green (1990: 77–9).

staunchest and most sophisticated defenders of Menander, such as Netta Zagagi, have allowed themselves to be drawn. There is a lot to be learned from Zagagi's stimulating discussion of Menander's mimetic art.⁷ Arguing for Menander's social and psychological credibility, Zagagi takes great pains to establish that Menander's characters and their choices conform to the realities of contemporary experience and are entirely plausible in human terms. Plays like the *Samia*, Zagagi argues (1994: 113), are family comedies 'composed almost entirely of realistic elements, which, in their dramatic-comic presentation, reflect the bourgeois aspirations of contemporary Athens'. Even plays like the *Dyskolos*, she adds, are founded on a dialectic between the expected social norms of the day and the requirements of a fairy-tale plot. In the *Dyskolos*, Zagagi (1994: 102) discerns 'an interplay between fiction and reality, in which the conventional presuppositions of the characters are turned upside down by the unconventional reality of the play itself'. By 'interplay' or 'tension', Zagagi (1994: 113) means that realistic details 'counterbalance the romantic conventions' of the genre (1994: 106) to make the play more believable within the context of contemporary reality. More specifically, the events 'satisfy the demands of comedy for "poetic justice" for the *dramatis personae* in the way most intelligible to an Athenian audience' (Zagagi 1994: 107).

Yet as long as one is trying to prove that Menander complies with some version of realism, which is understandable in modern terms and, although peculiar to Menander's time and place, it is comparable to late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century practice, one is arguing within the framework that Tarn and Green define – one is playing on their home turf, as it were. This way, inevitably, Menander's peculiarities are (re)constructed retrospectively, with reference to modern manifestations of realism, compared to which they can only be found wanting. To be sure, Peter Green himself anticipates such counter-argumentation as Zagagi's. Menander's supporters, he writes, are 'ignoring the substance of the attacks'. Menander's comedy may display

⁷ Zagagi (1994: 94–141).

'significant realistic detail' indeed (that much is beyond doubt), but it cannot stand up to scrutiny against a strict concept of representational mimesis understood in Platonic, Aristotelian or, much less, in modern terms. In Green's view, Menander's comedy is limited in scope, generic in nature and escapist in purpose.⁸

Green is plainly wrong, but Zagagi's defensive strategy plays into his hands. Defending Menander against such attacks by claiming that his realistic elements offset or outweigh any conventional improbabilities imposed by the genre is tantamount to dismissing the core of the New Comedy plot as an undesirable generic imperative, which Menander just could not do away with completely.⁹ Similarly, it is no less a critical blind-alley to construe an ancient concept of realistic drama defined only in negative terms (ancient = not modern), as something 'not quite like' the modern version, because it accepts genre-specific exceptions to verisimilitude, and thus different only in that it is more limited and more tolerant of unrealistic convention compared with our own. As long as modern realism, one way or another, remains the yardstick of Menander's 'success' or 'failure', one is trapped in an argumentative cul-de-sac of subjective comparisons and judgements, which lie beyond definitive proof and conviction.

What is required, I contend, is a fresh interpretive framework, which will investigate the narrative and theatrical strategies involved in Menander's engagement with reality and representation in their own terms; that is, a framework that will situate Menander's New Comedy between reality, textuality and Athenian civic ideology. The need for such a framework becomes even more urgent, since, if one reads between the lines of ancient testimonies – better, if one reads those testimonies in their rightful context and sense – one finds evidence that even in antiquity Menander's mimesis was regarded as something other than (or more than) a pure and innocent depiction of an objective historical reality. By extension, such 'grotesque devices' as the anagnorisis

⁸ P. Green (1990: 77).

⁹ Anticipating such responses again, P. Green (1990: 78) wondered piquantly whether we must think that by allowing conventional, unrealistic elements into his comedy Menander was simply making concessions to 'the Aunt Ednas of the Athenian bourgeoisie' in pursuit of 'the bitch-goddess success', and that to little avail!

appear, paradoxically, to be not an inevitable blemish, but an integral part of Menander's mimetic discourse.

What was at stake, then, in this Menandrian 'imitation of life' that the ancients praise so lavishly? And are there in ancient Menandrian criticism traces of a more nuanced perception of Menander's mimesis that can be understood without explicit or implicit comparison with modern notions of realism? Obviously, every ancient writer touching upon Menander's 'realism' has a different rhetorical axe to grind, but let us look specifically at Syrianus' commentary on Hermogenes' *On Modes of Proceeding* (Περὶ στάσεων), the source of none other than the Aristophanes quotation. The most relevant passage is pp. 19ff., especially pp. 22–23, 15 Rabe. This ancient source at least ascribes to Menander's 'realism' a more expansive and intricate nature and function than meets the eye.

The rhetorical term *staseis* refers to strategies an orator might use in the forensic or the political arena. In the wider context of the Aristophanes quotation, Syrianus is analysing particularly Hermogenes' remarks on *amphisbētēsis*, disputes between characters (*prosōpa*) or actions (*pragmata*), of the kind that concerns the citizens of a polis. The *stasis* at stake here is *poiōtēs*,¹⁰ that is, resting one's case on the intrinsic qualities and attributes of those characters and actions involved; that is to say, on who the person is (or is not) or on what the person has (or has not) done – or both. In the case of disputes between characters, Hermogenes instructs that πρόσωπα fall in two categories, the so-called *prosōpa eksetazomena* (those with distinct attributes, which can be qualified as either virtuous or vicious) and the *aorista* or *aneksetasta* (those who are not distinguished by anything in particular, hence there is a call for a more roundabout approach in commending or discrediting them, see pp. 19, 5–19). There are seven kinds of *prosōpa eksetazomena* according to Hermogenes; fourth among them is the *ēthika* ('such as farmers, gluttons and the like';

¹⁰ The other three στάσεις are: *stochasmos* (conjecture: did the accused commit the crime?); *horos* (definition: what did he do); and *metalēpsis* (transference: is this the right venue to try him?).

Syrianus glosses καὶ τὰ ὅμοια as ‘the avaricious and cantankerous types’) – the kind, Syrianus underlines, that the comedy of Menander represents with exquisite clarity.

Now, there is an interesting distinction in Hermogenes between *ta diabeblēmena* and *ta ēthika prosōpa*: the former term (‘such as gluttons or adulterers or fawners’) refers to the category of persons ‘hated for their wicked character as shown unambiguously by their actions’ (διαβεβλημένα καλεῖ τὰ διὰ τὴν φαυλότητα τοῦ τρόπου μισούμενα, ὧν αἱ πράξεις αὐταὶ κατηγοροῦσιν); the latter are those admired or hated ‘because of their *ēthos* pure and simple, even if they have done nothing suggestive’ (ἐκ μόνου τοῦ ἥθους, καὶ μὴδὲν αὐτοῖς ἢ κατειργασμένον): apparently, this *ēthos* can be gauged through perceptible signs that bespeak the agent’s nature without further need for telling actions. ‘Hence, (διόπερ) Aristophanes the grammarian, was spot on in the verses he wrote with reference to him: “oh Menander, oh life, which of you two truly imitates the other one?”.’

Aristophanes, Syrianus implies, was praising precisely this ethological exactitude of Menander, his ability to represent *ēthos* clearly and ‘realistically’, through words and apparently other means (visual signs, we shall argue in the following chapters), even without or prior to the emergence of significant actions. A sketching of *ēthos* along these lines (one’s own, a principal’s, an opponent’s) is expedient for an orator engaging in *amphisbētēsis*, as it can provide easy feed for recommendation or discredit.¹¹ Clearly, as his language suggests, Syrianus considered it equally fitting for Menander to arrange his characters in broad ethical categories, obviously for a similar reason: ‘therefore, also in the comedy of Menander, who has imitated life in such a lovely manner, all plots are constructed around such *ēthē*’ (ὁθεν καὶ Μενάνδρῳ τῷ κάλλιστα τὸν βίον ἐκμιμησαμένων πᾶσαι ὑποθέσεις ἐκ τῶν τοιούτων ἠθικῶν συμπληροῦνται).

But what more was in the balance when it came to representing *ēthos*? *Ēthos*, in Peripatetic philosophy most relevantly, was not

¹¹ ἐκ μόνου τοῦ ἥθους τὴν εὐπορίαν τῆς συστάσεως ἢ διαβολῆς παρέχει τῷ λέγοντι, pp. 22, 26–23, 1 (‘it provides the orator with the opportunity to praise or to slander based on character alone’).

exactly our own 'character'; it was precisely a person's innate proclivity towards virtue or vice¹² – of course, as perceived in the light of the individual's function as a member of a social group and according to the norms specific to that group. Menander, therefore, produced an exquisite imitation of life, inasmuch as his plots are cast with such *prosōpa ēthika*, recognisable types of fourth-century polis performing meaningful and believable ethical choices (what Aristotle terms *prohairesis*, 'purposive choice' or 'moral commitment to action'),¹³ which place them on the axis of virtue or vice.

This requires our close attention, though. Virtue and vice, as determined in social interaction, are not abstract moral qualities, but fraught constituents of civic discourse and, indeed, of civic polemics. A plethora of examples throughout antiquity supports Syrianus' suggestion that constructing ideals and counter-ideals was very common practice in polemical rhetoric. Hence, these *ēthē*, which bear on the agonistics of identity in the world of the polis, are finely sieved for elements worthy of praise or reproach, in other words they are so burdened with ideology that even if they are realistic, in the sense that their referents are notional analogues in contemporary society, still they are only superficially 'real'. In fact, the *ēthē* that Menander so accurately 'imitates' are value-added categories, which serve as a sounding board for constructing models of civic conduct.¹⁴ Constructing *ēthos* on the *rostrum* has less to do with realism and more to do with social mechanics, less even with abstract philosophical contemplation and more with consequential ideological discourse. It should be clear that at least Syrianus and Hermogenes, if not Aristophanes himself, claimed that things were not quite so different, when it came to imitating *ēthē*, on the stage of Menander; in other words, that they ascribed to Menander's 'realism', more

¹² On Aristotle's concept of *ēthos* in relation to the notions of *prohairesis* and *praxis*, see the relevant discussion in Chapter 3.

¹³ That Menander's comedy is deeply informed by Aristotelian philosophy has been well established by scholarship since the early decades of the twentieth century. I cite here only some of the more general studies: Tierney (1935–7); Post (1938); Barigazzi (1965); Gaiser (1967).

¹⁴ See Chapter 5 on the *panchrēstos* mask.

accurately to his playful engagement with reality, a more expansive function than meets the eye. If all the above is correct, Menander's 'realism' is as much creating a social reality as it is reflecting one; his verisimilitude is the disguise of, or the vehicle for, a discursive intent, and his ethical types, 'realistic' as they may be in their external accoutrements, are eventually capsules of philosophical and political (in the widest sense) debate. Hermogenes, after all, considers *amphibētesis* as 'a genre of political inquiry' (τοῦ πολιτικοῦ ζητήματος γένος).

The following sections will try to establish that the intuition of Syrianus and Hermogenes describes Menander's theatrical project more accurately than the modern frameworks proposed so far. More importantly, it offsets the simplistic view of Menander as a charming but trivial depicter of contemporary life. Not only is the impression that Menander is a mirror of life essentially misleading and unfair, it is also erroneous to believe that the ancient statements to that effect are as straightforward in their implications as a modern reader might believe. Zagagi (1994) is certainly correct that Menander's comedy is based on a tension between comedy and reality, but this tension, I argue, is not of the sort that Zagagi specifies.

A number of significant facts make a strong case that eventually realism is for Menander a point of departure, not a destination and a purpose. Menander's resolutions, more often than not, organise an impossible alignment of elements, for which a number of 'realistic' obstacles are summarily ignored. Such comic *lyseis* are ideologically manipulated, insomuch as in the 'magical' way they are advanced they constitute an expansion of contemporary society into a fictional analogue of its own self. Furthermore, in the inevitable comparison they draw between fictional and historical reality, the latter falls desperately short: this invests the denouement with a bittersweet sense of unreality, arguably not all that different from that of Aristophanes.

Finally, more often than not, the artificial element in Menander's realistic-looking stories is humorously over-determined by the fact that they 'urbanise' (reduce to the 'real' context of contemporary polis) narratives inherent in tragic myth and treated on

the stage of tragedy. These narratives come into play either as blueprints of the whole comic plot, as in the *Epitrepontes*, or as projections of particular scenes and specific characters onto archetypal and/or iconic moments of theatre and literature. This interplay, therefore, between an undeniable concern for the accurate representation of reality on the level of topographical, social, legal, psychological and linguistic detail; a larger, fictionalised framework, more emphatic perhaps in some plays than others, which qualifies that realistic representation; and a refined meta-poetic/metatheatrical craft, constitutes, I submit, the generic stamp of Menander's New Comedy.

On a superficial level, Menander's comedies may indeed project a more or less faithful image chiefly of urban Athens in the fourth century BC. Menander's Comedy, however: (a) expands – or 'dilates' – reality beyond its narrow actual confines, creating a fictional world of spacious social inclusiveness, where the contortions of reality are magically corrected, but not, and this is of the utmost essence, without an understated (but perceptible and certainly charged) sense of unreality; and (b) it is, to a large extent, theatrical in departure and intrinsically intertextual in nature, to the effect that social 'realism' (or the semblance thereof) is merely one stratum in the thick body of layers that make up the New Comedy plot.

I will argue in the second section of this chapter that Menander's 'realism', that is to say, the 'real-life' circumstances his characters are beset by, becomes a source of humour (among other things) as it is constantly cross-cut by theatrical parallels drawn from (tragic) myth: the mundane situations of comedy are disproportionately aggrandised by their juxtaposition with the tragic 'precedent', and their 'reality' is compromised by their being the mirrors of stories. On another level, though, this semblance of realism in Menander is eventually a source of discomfort, too. Toying with 'realism', I submit in the first section, Menander is frequently able to produce that blend of subtle humour and melancholy that is quintessentially Menandrian (and which was reputedly less palatable to Athenian audiences than other contemporary versions of New Comedy). The endings of Menander's plays often leave spectators with a bittersweet aftertaste, as

historical reality inevitably fails to measure up to the magically expanded 'reality' with which the plots conclude. The artificial revelry constructed by the denouement can neither erase the questions posed by the preceding events nor dull the vexing suspicion that this 'reality' is after all not 'realistic': at the end of the day, it is an ideological construct, as well as a product of textuality. This realisation speaks volumes about the nature of New Comedy as a genre at the brink of the Hellenistic era.

Menander and the expansion of reality

Let us flesh out these two points in opposite order, starting with the latter, this Menandrian expansion or 'dilation' of reality and, more importantly, its corollaries and its discontents. Social reality is by necessity a restrictive framework for any kind of comedy, even Menander's. The shortcomings of 'reality' – social prejudice, familial tensions, legal complications and impediments – are eventually superseded in Menander by way of a magical alignment of Nomos and Physis (Nomos being the laws of the state, and Physis the workings of natural attraction between a young man and a young woman) achieved through the intervention of Tyche,¹⁵ or some other overseeing deity like the Hero in the titular play or Pan in *Dyskolos*.

All too often, for instance, the adverse consequences of rape, which would have been disastrous for the victim's chances of marrying respectably, are thwarted by the lucky fact that the rapist turns out to be the husband the girl's father is about to give her (the case of Plangon in the *Samia*), or a man she ends up marrying anyway (the case of the girl wronged by Aeschinus in Terence's Menander-modelled *Adelphi*, and, more poignantly, of Pamphile in the *Epitrepontes*: in the latter case the girl was unaware that her husband was her rapist, too).¹⁶ In Terence's *Eunuchus*, 871–4, lurking behind the words of Chaerea, who has

¹⁵ On the role of Tyche in the plots of New Comedy, see mainly Vogt-Spira (1992) with earlier bibliography, to which add Haviland (1984). On Tyche in fourth-century Athenian religion and cult, see Parker (1996) 231ff.

¹⁶ Rape is of paramount significance in New Comedy. Important discussions of the motif, in relation to the poetics of the genre, its constructions of masculinity and its ideology of

just been caught red-handed having raped Pamphila, is an unusually transparent metatheatrical reference to the narrative significance of rape (and that in the only New Comedy play we know where rape takes place in the present of the action and not in the past – see Gilula 2007):

at nunc dehinc spero aeternam inter nos gratiam
fore, Thais. Saepe ex huius modi re quapiam
malo principio magna familiaritas
conflatast. Quid si hoc quispiam voluit deus?

But now I hope that from this will spring eternal friendship between us, Thais. Oftentimes, in situations like this the bad beginning kindles a great intimacy. What if some god wanted this to happen?

The reference to divine will here is deliciously ironic: not only because it points to the mythical archetypes behind such stories of rape magically transformed into a blessing (the beginning of a new line), but also because Chaerea perpetrates his *facinus* (probably Terence's word for *hybris* here) inspired by a painting on Thais' wall. The painting depicted a story from Euripidean tragedy: Chaerea practically styled himself as Zeus and Pamphila as Danae (*Eun.* 583–91).¹⁷

In other cases of magical rescue, as it were, girls living in veritable slavery (e.g., Philoumene of *Sikyonioi* or Pamphila of Terence's *Eunuchus*), prostituted maidens who cannot prove who they are (like Glycerium of *Andria*), or impoverished damsels reduced to the quasi-prostituted condition of *pallakeia* or other similar situations (like Glykera of *Perikeiromene*, Antiphila of the *Heautontimorumenos* or Phanium in the non-Menandrian *Phormio*) are thankfully discovered, in the nick of time, to be the daughters of Athenian citizens, hence they are restored to their rightful status and to a good marriage. The mechanical nature of *anagnorisis* is exposed emphatically in *Sikyonioi*, 312ff., in another scene of humorous metatheatrical colouring. Theron, the parasite, seeks to secure Philoumene for his provider, like

citizenship, include: P. Brown (1991); Heap (1998); Pierce (1998); Sommerstein (1998); Lape (2001), (2004), (2010a), (2010b); Omitowaju (2002).

¹⁷ On the Danae allusion in *Eunuchus*, see Papaioannou (2010: 151–62). On Chaerea and his outrageous actions, see further in Chapter 3.

parasites in comedy do. To that end he finds a poor wretch, whom he asks to play Philoumene's Athenian father. He has no idea who this man is. He has just picked him out of the crowd totally randomly, apparently because he seemed desperate enough to play along (cf. *Sik.* 374–6). Amidst the man's angry protestations, Theron tries to educate him how to play the part. This unfortunate fellow will soon prove to be the man himself, Philoumene's real parent. Until then Theron will interpret the signs of genuine emotion Kichesias is showing as he is being reminded of his misfortune (*Sik.* 357–8) as evidence that his 'actor' is taking to his part very well!¹⁸

What Tyche does in New Comedy is never to legitimise unlawful unions (e.g., between non-citizens or between young boys and unredeemed *hetairai*), but to align Eros with the law; that is, Tyche sees to it that those lovers who were instinctively drawn to each other, being indeed the 'natural selection' for marriage but plagued by legal technicalities, turn out in the end to be fulfilling all the official requirements after all. What initially looked like juvenile shenanigans, a case of *akrasia*,¹⁹ or even of subversive deviation, proves to have been spontaneous attraction between two agents meant to end up together in marriage.²⁰ The day is saved as if by a stroke of magic – or divine providence. The divine prologue, a common fixture of most Menandrian plays, performs a special role in this discourse. The fact that a deity presides over the proceedings and provides for the felicitous removal of the various obstacles obstructing the marriage is a strong comic statement that these unions, which perpetuate the body politic, as well as the 'natural' laws that govern them, also enjoy a divine stamp of approval. This is an important aspect of the whole question, under-appreciated by scholarship.

It transpires, therefore, that the arrangement at the end of Menander's plays is *not* just a happy-ending mechanism, but, on

¹⁸ For a study of anagnorisis in Menander with reference to the Aristotelian theories on drama, see Munteanu (2002).

¹⁹ On *akrasia* and the young men of New Comedy, see Chapter 3.

²⁰ Cf. Lape (2004: 16): 'Although these devices [recognitions, etc.] often lead to situations improbable in the extreme, they nevertheless have the effect of lending the norms of civic matrimony an air of inevitability' (my emphasis).

the contrary, a gesture of ideological consequence. Self-evident as it may sound today, this realisation is actually a recent breakthrough in Menandrian studies: a very important one, inasmuch as it dispelled, at long last, the time-honoured image of Menander as an apolitical escapist. Susan Lape, the most forthright and convincing proponent of the view that Menander's comedy is politically engaged, argues that 'Menander's Comedy depicts the Periklean citizenship law in action' (the law that only sanctioned marriages between people born *ek dyoin astoin*, 'from two citizen parents'),²¹ and that 'in so doing, it dramatizes, albeit in a generically mediated way, the law's effective yoking of marriage, sexuality and the gender system to the practice and ideology of democratic citizenship'.²² For Lape:

the model [Menander's] comedy constructs [sc. through its felicitous resolutions] is the democratic cultural order. Menander's plays never allow a violation of the laws or ideology pertaining to Athenian citizen membership . . . Comic performances both create the conditions for reproducing the polis and perform the state's laws of familial and political reproduction . . . The majority of the plays present eros or love, rather than law, as the motivation for citizen marriage. With this convention, comedy transforms the city's laws into innate principles of citizen identity or biology, thus masking highly political messages in stories that seem not to be political at all . . . By portraying [Perikles'] law in action, Menander's plays deploy a romantic narrative that makes the Periclean correlation between political and biological reproduction seem natural.²³

Lape considers Menander's comedy a form of democratic resistance to Macedonian autocracy. In her opinion, Menander writes a comedy 'with a deeply nationalistic perspective, [although] the plays never promote the citizenship system in a heavy-handed way'. Perhaps we should not go that far.²⁴ Tyche, indeed, removes all boundaries and obstacles in the end, and brings the desired unions to fruition – unions always in accordance, I repeat, with

²¹ On the citizenship law of Perikles, see A. R. W. Harrison (1968: 23–4); Todd (1993: 177–81). On the relevance of this law, particularly for New Comedy, see Lape (2004: 68–76, 99–100) with further bibliography on marriage, the *oikos* and democratic civic identity.

²² Lape (2004: 71). ²³ Lape (2004: 15–6, 71, 106).

²⁴ To be fair, of course, Lape admits that some aspects of Menander's plays at least expose the demerits of Athenian society, such as the double standard underpinning the gender system (see also Lape 2010b).

civic law. Be that as it may, though, it cannot be stressed strongly enough that the regular blocking features in many a play are precisely such laws as Perikles' or other similar strictures, for instance, the notorious epiklerate (the law that forced a woman whose *kyrios* has died to marry her next of kin). Indeed, to put it generally, the happy resolution in Menander is blocked by social prejudices, double standards and various mechanisms of exclusion that are intrinsic, not extraneous, to democracy. Even Menander's soldiers, a category in which Lape invests much meaning, are for the most part estranged citizens, not mercenaries of unambiguously alien extraction; that is, they constitute another case of civic ideology threatening to make things go awry, not a case of foreign powers impinging upon the democratic process of reproduction. Athenian civic law may be upheld in the end, but, in a paradox characteristic of Menander's comedy, it is in many a play initially at odds with the forces of nature. Menander's expanded reality as theatrical discourse is more intricate, I submit, than a straightforward pro-democratic (or indeed pro-Macedonian) declaration. It may not look so much outwards to antagonistic or more desirable forms of socio-political government, as inwards, making a statement about the slippage between real and fictional worlds. This, of course, does not render it any less 'political'; quite the contrary: it invests it with cutting introspective resonance.

The *Aspis* is an interesting play to discuss in this respect, even more so because in this play the solution is given not by aligning love with the epiklerate in any way, but explicitly by saving the young girl's and the *oikos*' interests against those of the girl's paternal uncle, who, poignantly so, acts in full and undeniable accordance with the law. Attempts have been made to mitigate the fact that this law repels even the barbarian slave Daos; however, it remains the most straightforward reading of the play that in the *Aspis summum ius* would surely result in *summa iniuria*.

The couple in trouble in the *Aspis* is young Kleostratos' sister and Chaireas, stepson of Chairestratos (who is brother to the meddlesome Smikrines and Kleostratos' deceased father). This girl is now legally speaking an *epiklēros*, since Kleostratos is presumed to have died in a mercenary mission abroad: his slave

Daos has returned from that mission with no body, but with lots of booty, enough to grab the attention of Smikrines, who seeks to take advantage of the situation. The marital union of Chaireas and Kleostratos' sister, intended by Chairestratos, would certainly be in accordance with Nomos, were it not for the youth's 'demise'. It is also in full harmony with Physis, primarily because the couple are young; that is, they belong to that class of New Comedy characters who are supposed to reinvigorate the citizen body by producing legitimate children (*arotos gnēsion paidōn*). Smikrines, on the other hand, who (lawfully, yet to everyone's repugnance) claims the girl in marriage as her next of kin, is a *pappos*; that is, he is generically destined either to be a mere blocking figure in matters of love or, should he engage in amorous tomfooleries, to be ridiculed as a *gerōn erastēs*.²⁵ The dialogue between Smikrines and his brother is suggestive (*Asp.* 256–60):

(XAI) Σμικρίνη

οὐδὲν μέλει σοι μετριότητος; (ΣΜΙ) διὰ τί, παῖ;

(XAI) ὦν τηλικούτος παῖδα μέλλεις λαμβάνειν;

(ΣΜΙ) πηλίκος; (XAI) ἐμοὶ μὲν παντελῶς δοκεῖς γέρων.

(ΣΜΙ) μόνος γεγάμηκα πρεσβύτερος;

(Chaer.) Smikrines, have you no respect for decency?

(Smi.) Why, pray?

(Chaer.) A man of your age to take a young girl in marriage?

(Smi.) What age?

(Chaer.) You look like a total old bag to me.

(Smi.) What, am I the only example of a fellow who got married late in life?

Further down, making Chaireas' case, Chairestratos adds pleadingly: 'let the lass find a groom of her own age' (τὴν δὲ παιδίσκην τυχεῖν ἢ καθ' ἡλικίαν ἔασον αὐτὴν νυμφίου, *Asp.* 266–7). It may well be, as Lape contends (2004: 108), that by emphasising Smikrines' age the characters are hinting narrowly that he is too old to sire children, but I see no reason to reduce the thrust of their indignation, that it is generally wrong for an old man to wed a young girl, especially this way.

²⁵ On the figure of *senex amator* in Greek and Latin New Comedy, see Cody (1976); Ryder (1984). On Menander's old men in general, see MacCary (1972).

For Peter Brown, who argues against MacDowell, Karabelias and Turner in this respect,²⁶ it is Smikrines, not the epiklerate law itself that comes under attack in the *Aspis*, because the law did not force Smikrines to claim his *kyrios*-less niece in marriage. This is certainly true to a certain extent: Menander's comedy is not about abstract forces working as external agencies, but about characters making free 'purposive choices' (*prohairesis*). However, it still stands that the law is in the way of 'love', the natural union that is imperative in the genre: '[the law] puts a weapon into Smikrines' hands', as Brown himself concedes (1983: 414).

Chaireas is in love with Kleostratos' sister *erōti ouk authairetōi* (*Asp.* 284ff.); that is, with a sort of automatic, natural attraction,²⁷ now threatened by the very state that the offspring of that love would perpetuate – for all the assent of Chaireas' legal guardian and notwithstanding the fact that the boy lacked none of the requirements, legal or moral, for becoming the girl's husband: 'the law makes a husband for her out of another man, passing over my own interests completely' (ἕτερον κύριον δ' αὐτῆς ποεῖ | ὁ νόμος ὁ τοῦμόν οὐδαμοῦ κρίνων ἔτι, *Asp.* 297–8). It is Smikrines' (admittedly self-serving) decision to uphold the law that sucks the already troubled comic universe into a real maelstrom. Chaireas deems his assertion *miarōn chrēma* ('a despicable affair', *Asp.* 314), and Smikrines himself *miarōtatōs* ('most despicable', *Asp.* 313). It should not be right to see Smikrines as 'oligarchic', that is, more or less as an external threat to the civic system, in his 'obsessive love of wealth'.²⁸ Smikrines' demand is a violation of

²⁶ Karabelias (1970); Turner (1979); MacDowell (1982); P. Brown (1983).

²⁷ Compare Sostratos' surprised cry in *Dysk.* 543–5: ἦκω δ' ἐνθάδε, | διὰ τί μὲν οὐκ ἔχω λέγειν μὰ τοὺς θεούς, | ἔλκει δέ μ' αὐτόματον τὸ πρᾶγμ' εἰς τὸν τόπον ('I have come here, but honest to God, I cannot say why; it is as if an automatic attraction hauls me to this place'). Cf. also Demeas' misguided praise of αὐτόματον in *Sam.* 163–4: he refers to Moschion's apparent eros for the girl he is preparing to betroth to him, which he believes to be a happy coincidence: ταῦτομάτ' ἔστιν, ὡς εἰσὶ, που θεός ('*automaton* – lucky coincidence – is some kind of God, it appears'). It should be obvious that such appeals to *automaton* as Moschion's in *Sam.* 55 (ἀπὸ ταυτομάτου δὲ συμβέβηκε, 'it was a lucky coincidence / it just so happened that ...') are not exhausted, as Casanova (2004) seems to suggest, to whatever humorous function they may perform. On the term *automaton* in relation to *tychē* in Menander, see Vogt-Spira (1992: 27–34).

²⁸ Lape (2004: 107). The namesake of Smikrines in the *Sikyoniōi* is, indeed, branded *oligarchikos* (in conjunction with *ponēros*, *Sik.* 156), but the situation there is different and not altogether clear.

metriotēs ('moderation'), an ethical flaw, an urban and comic instantiation, arguably, of the old *koros* ('insolence') of tragedy and archaic lyric.²⁹ It is also, more pragmatically, an affront of Nomos against Physis – and this Nomos is still a democratic one, very much so. New Comedy's relationship with 'reality' is more complex than a mere opposition between (Athenian) democracy and (Macedonian) oligarchy.

Tyche is a powerful physical presence in the *Aspis* from the start: she is the Prologue deity, who reassures the audience that Kleostratos will return. Tyche, however, also works through the lucky fact that Kleostratos' *oikos* houses a barbarian slave who is cunning and virtuous enough (in the case of comic slaves, cunning *is* virtue!) to devise a charade that will throw Smikrines off for as long as it takes for the girl's brother to re-emerge. In the end, the polis does not fall completely short. However, to avoid reading too much into this ending, namely, to avoid seeing Menander's comedy as merely reifying democracy, we need to remember this: in the final, crucial alignment of the elements, at long last, the law authorises – in most cases, to be accurate, it stops blocking – what Nature demands; however, even if the end-product is actually in many cases an enhanced, accentuated version of the Periklean imperative, which is now seen as an institutionalisation of natural impulse, Athenian democracy is practically pitted against its own self, not against non-democratic regimes, when its own legal workings, its own exclusionary mechanisms, hinder the 'natural' evolution of the body politic.

Interestingly, we shall argue further down, these shortcomings of the law, of 'reality', may be sugar-coated or whitewashed in Menander, but they are never truly erased. The dramatic point seems to lie here exactly. Menander's 'magical' resolutions stand out precisely due to the realistic background of his plots, which functions as a foil. The more 'real' the problem, the more uneasy seems the mechanical, ultimately imperfect, way the knot is untied in the end. This is a point of utmost significance. The 'dilation' of reality, the fact that it took a magical twist of fate to save the day

²⁹ Cf. Thgn. 153; Sol. 8; Pi. O. 13.10.

(in this case, the fortuitous re-appearance of a lost sibling), is a process ultimately designed to feel comically (or not so comically) unreal.

Scholars are wont to find logical or other 'flaws' in such dramatic devices as Daos' plan in the *Aspis*, and implicitly to hold that supposed imperfection against Menander. Stanley Ireland (2010: 98), for example, writes (*ad Asp.* 348–55):

Commentators have pointed out the flaw in [Daos' plan] – the fact that Chair-estratos cannot remain dead for ever, and once he resurfaces there may be nothing to prevent Smikrines from reverting to his former plan (Ireland 1992; Scafuro 1997, 340–50).

This is a clever, but ultimately misguided, analysis. Comic time, for one, is condensed and cannot be stretched beyond the boundaries it sets for itself: there is no 'for ever' in comedy, only 'for as long as it takes'. More poignantly, the improbability of Daos' plan in 'realistic' terms is an inalienable part of this *coup de théâtre*. In other words, the theatrical effect of this type of Menandrian resolution depends on a noticeable and perpetual state of deferral, of non-concurrence and non-identification, dividing the 'actual' and the 'comic' worlds. Here we begin to feel that vestige of discomfort we claimed to be the quintessence of Menander's play with reality.

Let us delve into another example. The *Epitrepontes* is a very different play to the *Aspis*, but still one pivoting on a 'magical' rescue no less. The problem here is yet another Smikrines, this one bent on exercising his paternal right of *aphairesis*, that is, to dissolve his daughter's marriage, which he considers detrimental to her best interests.³⁰ He is obviously wrong in moral terms (and in terms of what the audience already knows but he and his daughter do not), but again totally within his rights legally and politically speaking. The rescue here is achieved, on top of all the incidental *anagnorismoi* ('recognitions'), by an event different in kind, still but no less extraordinary: the daughter's brash claim to self-determination, her demand to be allowed to decide her own

³⁰ On the right of *aphairesis*, see A. R. W. Harrison (1968: vol. 1, 30–2).

fate, a veritable revolt on her part against paternal authority (*Epir.* 702–835 Furlley). Her discourse in this scene is one of the most astonishing in the New Comedy we know:

πάπ<π>α τι <δὲ> τοῦτ' ἐστ' 705

αἰεὶ σὺ γίνῃ κύριός μου;

...

τὰμφιβ[ο]λα δεῖ[ται] φροντίδος πολλῆς αἰεὶ

...

ἀλλ' εἴ με σῶζων τοῦτο μὴ πείσῃς ἐμέ, 713

οὐκέτι πατήρ κρίνοι' ἄν, ἀλλὰ δεσπότης

...

ὦ πάτερ, ἐμὴν γνώμην λέγειν πεπλα[σμένην] 800

ἔχω περὶ πάντων, ὅ τι ποθ' ἡγεῖ συμφέρε[ιν],

ἢ κα[ὶ] φελῇ· καὶ γὰρ φρονεῖν εἰμ[perhaps οὐ κακῇ, after Gronewald]³¹

Daddy, what is this? Will you be my guardian for all eternity?

...

When things are not entirely straightforward, one needs to examine them very carefully

...

But if you are saving me but I am not convinced to that effect, it could be assumed that you are not a father to me anymore, but a master.

...

Father, I am capable of speaking my own mind on anything you would consider proper in an elaborate or plain manner – because I, too, can make good sense.

There seems to be an echo of Sophocles' *Electra*, 597–8, in Pamphile's bold distinction between a father and a tyrant (*Epir.* 713–14). However, notice the difference between Electra's

³¹ Austin (2008) prints a text quite different from Arnott (1996b) and Furlley (2009) (see Austin's apparatus for the relevant credits for the supplements): οὐ, πάτερ, ἐμὴν γνώμην λέγειν πεπλα[σμένην] | δεῖ περὶ ὅ[π]άντων ὅ τι ποθ' ἡγεῖ συμφέρε[ιν], | αἰεὶ δ' ἄφ[ε]λῇ· καὶ γὰρ φρονεῖν εἰμ[αρτό σοι] | τὸ δικά[σιον], ἢ τ' εὐνοία ὑπερισταμένη [ποεῖ/ χρηστοῖς] σε πείθεσθ[αι γ']· ὁ μᾶλλον ἐπ' ἀγαθῶ ('Father, I must not express my thoughts with artifice | on all the topics you deem advantageous | but always in plain language. Fate has made you understand what is right and your goodwill, acting as a shield, makes you | listen to fair arguments – which is an added bonus'). Furlley (2013: 86) comes much closer to Austin: [δεῖ, πάτερ, ἐμὴν γνώμην λέγειν πεπλα[σμένην] | ἡκιστα] πάντων, ὅ τι ποθ' ἡγεῖ συμφέρε[ιν], | αἰεὶ δ' ἄφ[ε]λῇ· καὶ γὰρ φρονεῖν εἰμ' [ἐνδίκος] | τὸ γ' ἴδ[ι]ον, ἢ τ' εὐνοί' ἀνέριστά μ' ἐν[νοεῖν] | τούτοις σε πείθεσθ[αι] | δὲ μᾶλλον ἐπά[γεται] ('Father, that I tailor my opinion artificially to what you think most advantageous, is out of the question. I must be plain. For I am entitled to think independently about my lot, and goodwill calls for uncontentious words and that you should rather be persuaded thereby').

categorical tone (καὶ σ' ἔγωγε δεσπότην | ἢ μητέρ' οὐκ ἔλασσον εἰς ἡμᾶς νέμω, 'I take you to be more of a tyrant than a mother towards us') and Pamphile's conditionals, which allow hope and serve as polite admonition (νουθεσία) – a thing which for Electra is explicitly out of the question (595–7: ἀλλ' οὐ γὰρ οὐδὲ νουθετεῖν ἔξεστί σε | ἢ πᾶσαν ἵης γλῶσσαν ὡς τὴν μητέρα | κακοστομοῦμεν, 'but we cannot even admonish you, as you go about saying that I am talking ill of my mother'). Yet the very fact that Pamphile is addressing her father here, not her mother (woman to man rather than woman to woman), still has an aura of brashness, which aligns her (always with the necessary pinch of humour) rather with the outspoken heroines of tragedy than with the ideological paradigm of a fourth-century BC Athenian maiden.

The Smikrines of *Epitrepontes* appears, if we believe the slave Onesimos, to have something of his *Aspis*-namesake's self-interest.³² However, that Smikrines was a shameless money-grabber; this one's intentions are murkier, more open to interpretation; and certainly, his argumentation in this particular scene is hardly assailable in logical or, indeed, legal terms. Smikrines' first argument is a strong syllogism: the profligate Charisios has already been ruined financially, so if Pamphile stays with him, she too will be engulfed by destitution (*Epitr.* 702–3, 720, 750).³³ His second point is a reasonable warning: Charisios is actually dilly-dallying between two *oikoi*, so if Pamphile stays she will condemn herself to the agony of long, lonely, miserable vigils waiting for him to return from his debauchery in Piraeus (*Epitr.* 752–5). Smikrines' third argument, a practical consideration, is the most pungent of them all. I cite the text with the new additions and restorations by Römer (2012a) and with the improvements by Furley (2013):

³² Cf. Onesimos' taunting words in *Epitr.* 1078–80 F.: 'Who's knocking on the door? Ah, it's obnoxious Smikrines, who has come for his dowry and his daughter' (τίς ἐσθ' ὁ κόπτων τὴν θύραν; ὦ, Σμικρίνης | ὁ χαλεπός, ἐπὶ τὴν προῖκα καὶ τὴν θυγατέρα | ἦκων). Further down Onesimos calls him a λογιστικός ἀνὴρ ('a calculating man').

³³ Smikrines' tirade against Charisios is now more complete thanks to the publication of new fragments by Römer (2012a, 2012b).

Menander and the expansion of reality

[γυναῖ]κα ἐπίβο[υλον λ]οιδορίᾳ κάβ[ελτ]έραν
 [ῆ διαβαλεῖ σε· αἰτουμένη μὲν οὔν ἀπ]αν.³⁴
 [εἰς τα]ῦτ' ἐνέγκ[ασθαι], μετέχουσα σ' [ἐ]ξ ἴσου
 [καλ]ῶς³⁵ βιώσεται· εἰκότως καὶ ἄν[ευ] κακῶν·
 [ἔ]ση δὲ τοῦτ' αὐτῇ παραμύθιον ποτε
 [ἀεὶ σ]κυθρωπάζουσα, νουθετοῦσ' ἀεὶ,
 [γαμε]τῆς ἔχουσα σχῆμα κατακεκομμένη[ς].³⁶
 [τάδ' ἔ]σθ' ἃ παραλύσει σε· χαλεπόν, Παμ[φίλη]
 ἔλευθέρᾳ γυναικὶ πρὸς πόρνην μάχη·
 πλείονα πανουργεῖ, πλείον' οἶδ', αἰσχύνεται
 οὐδέν, κολακεύει μᾶλλον, αἰσχρῶν [ᾗ]πτεται.³⁷

... a treacherous and slanderous woman and a silly one.³⁸ She will defame you. She will demand that everything be held in common and that she have an equal share,³⁹ obviously she will live a cosy life of no trouble. And in that respect you will be a source of recreation⁴⁰ for her, constantly glum, as you will be, constantly critical, giving the impression of a wife that has been totally exhausted.⁴¹ These are the things that will finish you. Pamphile, it is very difficult for a freeborn woman to contest a whore. She is far more cunning, far more experienced, utterly shameless, a better flatterer, and not one to shy away from any sordid deed.

At least on the face of it, Smikrines makes perfect sense. What is Pamphile's reaction to all that? Not any logical counter-argumentation, but an even stronger emotional outburst, which arguably burns all bridges with social verisimilitude. Pamphile

³⁴ οὔν ἀπ]αν Furley (2013: 84); αἰ[του]μένη μὲν οὔ[δέ]ν Römer (2012a). Cf. Furley (2013: 84): 'Habrotonon will demand that Charisios' income be pooled, then demand equal shares with Pamphile. I.e., although Pamphile is the wife, she, Habrotonon, will be on a par with her economically.'

³⁵ [ἀπὸν]ως Furley (2013). ³⁶ κατακεκλασμένης Furley (2013) ('broken-hearted').

³⁷ Austin (2008: 24) supplements εὐπορεῖ at the behest of Rudolf Kassel. Römer (2012a: 12) sees traces of the letters ετα in the new fragment, and thinks that]χετα[or]τετα[should not be excluded.

³⁸ Römer (2012a) translates: '[you will experience | the] woman, a slanderous schemer, and a blockhead', whereas Furley (2013) takes ἀβελτέρα to mean 'shameless'. It may also be possible that the ἐπίβουλος and the ἀβελτέρα are not the same woman, and that the ἀβελτέρα is Pamphile herself, who is willing to submit to Habrotonon's outrage: thus, Habrotonon will heap upon Pamphile every sort of insult, whereas Pamphile will be in no position to react.

³⁹ Or, if Römer's supplement is correct: 'not being asked to contribute anything to this household, yet having an equal share in it ...' (Römer's translation).

⁴⁰ I think this is a more accurate rendition of παραμύθιον than Römer's 'encouragement'. Habrotonon will laugh derisively at Pamphile's discontent, Pamphile's trouble will entertain the whore.

⁴¹ Lit. 'cut to pieces', i.e. 'totally beaten and vanquished in this peculiar *agōn*. This sense is just as effectively served by Furley's κατακεκλασμένης, 'broken in spirit, despairing'.

(the text is corrupt here, but the meaning comes across clearly enough) apparently even vows to accept the social ignominy and psychological aggravation of putting up with Charisios' supposed double life (*Epir.* 817ff.). Imagine the subversion: Pamphile proves just as *aphelēs* ('brazen') as the fragmentary ancient hypothesis wants the *hetaira* Habrotonon to be.⁴²

This is a touching oxymoron (yet, it is clear, one that would make sense only in comedy): Pamphile, ignorant that her child is Charisios', or that her husband has not touched his prostitute, or that Habrotonon is in fact one of those 'golden courtesans' of comedy (*chrysai hetairai*) – that is to say, having no substantial guarantees whatsoever that she is not condemning herself to a life of misery – is still willing to save her marriage by condoning Charisios' practical bigamy! Pamphile's stance is nothing short of self-excommunication from the ranks of respectable women:⁴³ this is again exactly the kind of unrealistic, magical event that commonly saves the day in the comedy of Menander against odds stemming from human nature as much as from (democratic) culture. The 'magic' here, as in the *Aspis*, where Daos' sham could also last only for so long, lies in the power of comedy to 'achieve much in a single day' (πóλλ' ἄν γένοιτο ἐν ἡμέρᾳ μίξ, *Dysk.* 300): Pamphile can call a halt to her father's plans only for a short while, but this is enough for the salutary events to occur.

What cannot happen in real life certainly can happen in comedy. This is the crux of the matter: by effecting, in such haphazard manner, unions that were natural but otherwise seemingly unsanctioned and thus normally impossible to sustain, or by saving marriages like Pamphile's by a hair's breadth and by acts of female self-empowerment imaginable perhaps in tragic myth but less so (or not at all) elsewhere, Menander's comedy intimates that in actuality there lies a marked cleavage between *Nomos* and *Physis*. The alignment of *Nomos* and *Physis*, which consolidates the comic world at the end of Menander's plays, as Comedy

⁴² POxy 4020, ll. 11–12: γαμετὴν κοσμίως ἔχουσιν | ἑταίραν ἀφελῶς ('a married woman behaving properly, a *hetaira* in brazen fashion').

⁴³ A fine study of women of Menander is offered by Traill (2008): on the *Epileptontes* in particular, see pp. 177–244.

requires, is usually so artificial that it cannot help but be exposed as exactly comic. Consequently, a charged space opens up between historical reality and the reality of the play, which brims with disconcerting irony.

This leads us to the next, crucial, point. In Menander, more often than not, the eventual solution is not a true re-solution: the romantic knot may be untied, but its root causes (for instance, the abovementioned double standard in the gender system exposed in the *Epitrepontes*, the failures of patriarchy in Menander's *Samia* or Terence's *Hecyra*, or the barbarity of the *epiklēros* laws in the *Aspis*, mordantly noted by a barbarian of all people),⁴⁴ are never truly resolved, quite the contrary: they are practically swept under the carpet. That these loose ends are left hanging in the midst of the concluding party – ostentatiously, and thus no doubt ironically, drowned in wine and song – is, I think, one of the hallmarks of Menander's comedy. It also speaks volumes as to the kind of 'realism' he exercises. I will deal with the *Dyskolos* in this respect, another good example of the dilative effect of Comedy on a strictly confined social norm, but also of that bittersweet aftertaste that Menander's denouements leave the spectator with.

Pan, setting in motion the chain of events that bring about the *lysis*,⁴⁵ some of which are his own doing (the mother's dream and the resulting sacrifice) and some are the concomitant results of human choices, that is, products of the human agents'

⁴⁴ The figure of the barbarian in New Comedy is under-studied: see Long (1986); Wiles (1988b); Petrides (2014a).

⁴⁵ Scholarly opinions on Pan in *Dyskolos* span two extremes. Some scholars see Knemon's fate as a form of divine retribution on the part of Pan and/or the Nymphs, thus identifying the role of Pan with that of Aphrodite in *Hippolytos* or Dionysos in *Bacchae* (Photiadēs 1958; Borgeaud 1988; Lonsdale 1993). Others deny Pan any substantial role whatsoever, dismissing the god as a mere mechanism of dramatic convenience (M. Anderson 1970). Ludwig (1970), with the important remarks by E. W. Handley in the discussion; Goldberg (1978), (1980); and Zagagi (1994: 156–68), balance the dialectics of god and man in the play more accurately, but are still reluctant to see in Pan a prologue deity of a different order to Agnoia or Tyche. Generic prejudice demanding that New Comedy be a thoroughly secular genre obfuscates even the obvious fact that such plays were not staged in an anthropological and religious vacuum. Important personal deities cannot but carry with them their cultural associations.

natural disposition (*tropos*),⁴⁶ does away with two debilitating obstructions at one stroke: the grouch's sociopathy and the class difference between Knemon's family and Kallippides'.⁴⁷ The result is that a union that seemed absolutely impossible as late as Act IV is finally achieved amidst the sounds of raucous laughter and joy that befit the god.

This accentuation of comicality at the end of the play is too emphatic to escape attention. The *Dyskolos* ends with a scene so farcical as to make some scholars think of mime rather than comedy of the Menandrian stripe: I am referring, of course, to the forceful dragging of Knemon into Pan's cave to participate in the celebrations.⁴⁸ Knemon in his famous *apologia pro vita sua* in Act IV had given the impression that he recanted his ways, only to return with fresh demands to be left alone in his final, crippled days. The family respects his wishes and leaves. The play seems to draw to a conclusion with the image of Knemon's incurable intransigence. Notice the exhausted tone, but also the strong closural essence in the farewell addressed to Knemon: ἄλλὰ πολλὰ χαίρω | ἡμεῖς δ' ἴωμεν, 'whatever, forget about him, let us go', 870–1). Yet two slaves take it upon themselves to drag the old man into the party. Suddenly and unexpectedly, the play restarts in a way that is too wanton not to be perplexing.

Now, in various ways throughout the play, Knemon had been given the 'mask' of a beast. The crucial word, even more than the titular *dyskolos*, is Pan's pregnant term *apanthrōpos* (ἀπάνθρωπος τις ἄνθρωπος σφόδρα | καὶ δύσκολος πρὸς ἅπαντας, 'a singularly inhuman man, bad-tempered towards everyone', *Dysk.* 6–7). The semantics of *apanthrōpia* encompasses the whole nexus of references to Knemon in the play, and is a term whose semantic spectrum is too wide to be reduced to a single referent: Arnott's

⁴⁶ On the relation between *tropos* and *tychē* (or other agencies) in Menander, see Vogt-Spira (1992: 138–45) (on *Dyskolos* in particular) and 179–83 (generally). See also Zagagi (1994: 142–68).

⁴⁷ The sociology and the politics of the *Dyskolos* are important topics, which have known several fine studies: see Ramage (1966); G. Hoffmann (1986); Khan (1993); Lape (2001); Rosivach (2001); Cox (2002a), (2002b).

⁴⁸ Hunter (2002: 201–6), and the same in Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004: 416, 417): 'The closing scene ... incorporates into the play a "low" or farcical version of the plot ... where parodic farce stains the values of the higher mode.'

‘hermit’, for instance (1979, *ad loc.*), causes this reduction. *Apanthrōpia* projects upon Knemon a state of mental disorder, which results in inhuman savagery, wanton cruelty to oneself and others, and compulsive self-isolation. In Greek literature, *apanthrōpia* came to be juxtaposed with a number of correlatives denoting primitive brutality and savagery: *ōmotēs* (‘raw violence’); *chalepotēs* (from ‘unpleasant’ to ‘savage’, e.g., Ar. V. 942); *agriotēs* (‘savagery’, e.g., X. An. 5.8.24, on the savagery of dogs, this animal being an important motif in the *Dyskolos*); *misoxenia* (‘hatred of guests’, e.g., D. S. 40.3.4); and, significantly, with *asebeia* (‘impiety’, e.g., Lib. Decl. 45.2.9). Knemon is decried as *agrios* (*Dysk.* 388) and *chalepos* by Sostratos (*Dysk.* 171, 325) and Sikon (*Dysk.* 628); *anēmeros* (‘untamed, wild’) and *anosios* (‘unholy’) by Pyrrhias (*Dysk.* 122–3); *hierosylos* (‘sacrilegious, breaker of religious custom’) by Sikon again (640). *Apanthrōpia* is also the *vox propria* for disproportionate punishment,⁴⁹ and total lack of sensitivity and consideration.⁵⁰ A good beating (*Dysk.* 195) or even death is what Simikhe should expect for dropping the bucket and the mattock into the well (*Dysk.* 587). Knemon’s meanness forced his wife to abandon him (*Dysk.* 20–3). As for Knemon’s compulsive introversion and solitude: the comment by Gorgias in *Dysk.* 332–3 (ἡδιστον ἐστ’ αὐτῷ γὰρ ἀνθρώπων ὁρᾶν | οὐδένα, ‘his greatest pleasure is to see no one’) takes up Pan’s οὐ χαίρων τ’ ὄχλῳ (‘he is not enjoying a big crowd’, *Dysk.* 7, a delightful understatement). Gorgias also qualifies Pan’s λελάληκεν ἡδέως ἐν τῷ βίῳ | οὐδενί (‘there is no man to whom he has spoken with pleasure in his life’, *Dysk.* 9–10) in *Dysk.* 334–5: προσλαλεῖ ταύτῃ μόνῃ | ἑτέρῳ δὲ τοῦτ’ οὐκ ἂν ποιῆσαι ῥαδίως (‘she is the only one he talks to; he wouldn’t easily do that to any other person’). Finally, *ōmotēs* and *ōmophagia* (‘the eating of raw flesh’), properties of natural life in the case of the Cynic Diogenes, are reduced to (farcical) cannibalism in *Dysk.* 467–8 (see also *Dysk.* 124–5). In a nutshell, *apanthrōpia* equates ‘inhumanity’,

⁴⁹ For example, Posid. fr.136b Theiler, Cassius Dio, 56.41.6.

⁵⁰ Cf. Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 1126b11ff.: δύσκολοι . . . οἱ . . . πρὸς πάντα ἀντιτείνοντες καὶ τοῦ λυπεῖν οὐδ’ ὅτιοῦν φροντίζοντες (‘cantankerous are the people who have a contrarian attitude regarding every single thing and who do not show the slightest concern if they are being hurtful to others’). Cf. also *Eth. Nic.* 1108a26ff.

a state of emotional numbness, with 'non-humanity', the ambiguous ontological ground shared by the divine and the bestial.

Knemon's *apologia* did not do much to disprove this distressing image, quite the opposite. This important speech revolves around the notion of *autarkeia*, self-sufficiency, an aptitude of gods and beasts. Knemon is seemingly apologetic for his beastly autarkic ways in the *apologia*, but his true goal, it transpires, is to reclaim a new sense of this ideal founded on *metriotēs* and *litotēs*, moderation and simplicity (ἐχῶν δ' ἂν μέτρι' ἑκάστος ἡγάπα, 'each person having what he needs would be content', *Dysk.* 745). This is in fact the Cynic version of autarky, emblematised by the Cynic Diogenes,⁵¹ and before him by Socrates and Antisthenes.⁵² It originated in the ideal of an ascetic life of meditation, which met needs by limiting Need. *Autarkeia* for Diogenes meant contentment with the bare necessities of life (food, shelter and clothing of the meanest sort). The misanthropic traits of Knemon overlap significantly with Diogenes the Dog's traditional image, at least to the casual observer: he lives on the bare essentials (he seems to have only one bucket and only one mattock), being poor by choice; he leads a dog's life by reducing himself to tasks unthinkable for an Athenian citizen, such as cleaning his household of dung (*Dysk.* 584–6) or recovering a house utensil from a well (*Dysk.* 626–8); he is wild and ferocious, snapping rudely at people and hurling diatribes against their ills and depravities, especially over their lust for possessions and gain (*Dysk.* 719–20). Like Diogenes, he specifically opposes traditional religious practices, if not religion at large (*Dysk.* 442–55).

Yet Knemon does not denounce need in general, but the need for 'assistants' (*ton epikourēsonta*, *Dysk.* 717). His dream seems to be to overcome the irritating imbecility of human nature, which renders the appeal for help inevitable. Knemon seems to be claiming his right to stick to *autarkeia* in its positive, Cynic guise. Unfortunately for Knemon, though, his own version, *autarkeia* as

⁵¹ The ancient testimonies on Diogenes and the Cynics (deriving mainly from Diogenes Laertius, 6.20–81) are gathered in Giannantoni (1983–5), Paquet (1988); and Skouleropoulos (1998).

⁵² See Nickel (1972).

total self-reliance, historically corresponded not to Diogenes, but to another famous autark, the sophist Hippias (or, at least, his Platonic *persona*). In Plato's *Hippias Minor* (368a8–369a2), the sophist gloats that he has become self-sufficient by maximising his capacity to meet an ever-increasing amount of needs without recourse to external backing: he has learned every skill and craft, and can perform every conceivable task. The sophistic idea of autarky elevates the individual above the communal and puts strain on the foundations of classical society itself. The literary incarnation of this idea, of course, predates the Sophists: it is primarily the Cyclops Polyphemus, whose echoes in the *Dyskolos* have long been recognised. For Polyphemus, the most 'Cyclopic' among the Cyclopes, self-sufficiency is perceived in terms of might: the Cyclopes do not take any heed of Zeus; they are, that is, self-sufficient because they are *poly pherteroi* ('much more powerful', Hom. *Od.* 9.276). Polyphemus' buffoonish Euripidean counterpart gives this view a sophistic socio-political, even economic, twist: ὁ πλοῦτος, ἀνθρωπίσκε, τοῖς σοφοῖς θεός ('wise people think wealth is god, little man', Eur. *Cycl.* 316).

It transpires that Knemon's apologetic strategy is to denounce a Cyclopic/sophistic sense of self-sufficiency, in order to be allowed its Cynic correction. Yet the fantasy world he describes in *Dysk.* 742–6 is too evocative of *Od.* 9.112–15⁵³ to allow the Cyclopes to fade away. In a circular fashion, with his final daydream about a society with no courts (*dikastēria*) – that is, no laws (*themistes*)! – and practically no human interaction (each individual keeping to himself),⁵⁴ Knemon unwittingly regresses from Diogenes back to

⁵³ Compare: *Dysk.* 742–6: 'I want to say a few words to you in support of myself and my ways: if everyone was like that, neither would there be courts of law nor would they drag themselves to prisons nor would there be war, but everyone would have what they needed and be content' (ὑπὲρ ἐλμοῦ γὰρ βούλομ' εἰπεῖν ὀλίγα σοι καὶ τοῦ τρόπου – | εἰ τοιοῦτοι πάντες ἦσαν, οὔτε τὰ δικαστήρια | ἦν ἄν, οὔθ' αὐτοὺς ἀπῆγον εἰς τὰ δεσμοτήρια, | οὔτε πόλεμος ἦν, ἔχων δ' ἂν μέτρι' ἕκαστος ἡγάπα); with Hom. *Od.* 9.112–15: 'they have neither councils making decisions nor laws; instead they reside on the top of high mountains, in well-shaped caves, and each governs their children and wives, and they pay no attention to one another' (τοῖσιν δ' οὔτ' ἀγοραὶ βουλευφόροι οὔτε θέμιστες, | ὅλλ' οἳ γ' ὑψηλῶν ὄρεων ναίουσι κάρηνα | ἐν σπέεσι γλαφυροῖσι, θεμιστεύει δὲ ἕκαστος | παίδων ἢ δ' ἀλόχων, οὐδ' ἀλλήλων ἀλέγουσι).

⁵⁴ On the deep ambivalence of the Cyclopean utopia and its affinities with the Golden Age of Hesiod (*Op.* 109–18), cf. Nieto Hernandez (2000). This Golden Age of Cronus is

Polyphemus, the beast, at the moment when he came closest to re-joining the society of men.

Knemon's *apologia* is circular; thus, it fails to be redeeming. Theatrically speaking, blocking itself, namely, the position of Knemon's body on the *ekkyklēma*, seems evocative of his impasse in this scene. Knemon enters lying on the *ekkyklēma*: this is the nearly fatal result of his isolationism. He asks his daughter to help him stand up to deliver the part of the speech supposed to 'resurrect' him to society (*Dysk.* 700–1). He invites her to help him lie down again (*Dysk.* 740) before he reverts to the kind of rhetoric that stretched him on the couch in the first place (*Dysk.* 740–7). In the final scene, Knemon is again lying on his back as the two slaves bully him: the implication that his fate there results from his obstinacy here is inevitable.

It is true that beasts, the notorious 'agelasts', receive their true desserts in comedy. But even so, the final scene remains baffling. The torture of Knemon by the slaves is a perverted version of the two knocking sequences earlier in the play.⁵⁵ The slaves then had knocked on Knemon's door timidly to ask for various simple paraphernalia for the sacrifice, and they received taunts and threats. Now they turn the tables on Knemon with the most extravagant requests and the most insolent knocking. The text is unforthcoming, but one gets the strong impression that the recipient of the knocking this time round, completing the reversal and the revenge, is actually not the door, but Knemon's own body, as he is gradually coming out of his stupor – in a way reminiscent this time of Heracles (another man-beast!) in the *exodos* of Sophocles' *Trachiniae*. If this is correct (theatrically it would be most apposite), then the slaves' project to 'tame the man' (ἄνθρωπος ἡμερωτέος, *Dysk.* 903) is carried out with even more outrageous acts of physical violence than merely by pushing him around and calling him names. Be that as it may, there is no doubt that Knemon is being violated here, knocking or no knocking on

equally ambiguous: Cronus eats his children – what Knemon almost does, metaphorically of course, to his own daughter!

⁵⁵ On the door-knocking scenes in *Dyskolos*, see Katsouris (1981); Dedoussi (1988); Traill (2001); and Petrides (2004).

his person. His bestiality is no longer, as it were, a mere metaphor: taming of actual beasts, after all, involves physical violence as a rule. The whole process is certainly a farce, drowned in raucous sounds of bacchic fun, but there is something cacophonous about this whole affair, which cannot easily be glossed over (as a mere generic convention or as the result of youthful inexperience on the part of Menander).

Knemon's final fate becomes even more bewildering if one considers the following. Misanthropes in general may be obnoxious, but they are rarely villainous.⁵⁶ On the contrary, their compulsive solitude, their bitterness and rambling seem to possess some sort of indignant nobility, even a mad sort of revolutionary heroism. Knemon even goes a step further compared with traditional misanthropes, in that he never elaborates on the reasons for his seclusion. If there is one thing that misanthropes enjoy and rarely eschew is to vent their anger against those whom they love to hate. In the course of this venting they often seem ridiculous, or at least quaint. But not Knemon; until his long *apologia*, in which, as argued, language actually fails him, Knemon keeps obstinately silent in the play, shunning even the one form of social interaction misanthropic types rarely deny themselves: the long, angry tirade (with one notable exception only, his seething denunciation of the excesses of sacrifice, *Dysk.* 447–53, which prefigures ironically his plight in the final scene: one suspects that this is precisely the reason Menander gives him that one). A maddening plethora of possible explanations is gradually accrued about Knemon's demeanour (social, psychological, even medical), always by others and each as speculative as the next one. Nothing by Knemon himself, though. We hear of no insult or injury, no painful past experience, no ideological objections or qualms of conscience. This reticence, I argue, far from rendering Knemon a mere figure of fun, as Schäfer believed,⁵⁷ invests him with certain dignity, or at least makes more of him than

⁵⁶ For a 'history of misanthropes', with reference to Menander's *Dyskolos* and beyond, see Photiadès (1958); Préaux (1959); Konstan (1983b); Barataud (1990). The most famous misanthrope, of course, is Timon of Athens. On the relation between Knemon and the legends of Timon, see Schmid (1959a), (1959b).

⁵⁷ Schäfer (1965).

a mere buffoon: because, above all, the possible reasons for Knemon's discontent and withdrawal from organised life (the blatant disparity in wealth and culture between city and country, the class tensions between rich and poor, etc.), coincide with the major social criticisms of the play and come out clearly in the discourse of other characters, especially Gorgias. Until his felicitous encounter with Sostratos, that is, until Pan sets in motion the train of events that will set them all free, Knemon's stepson is a virtuous lad buried in his work and angry at the world: he is, it is scarily clear, a Knemon in waiting.⁵⁸ Knemon's spiritual affinity with Gorgias, if one looks below the curtain of the happy resolution, is most disturbing; it constitutes the single most powerful insinuation of the play, an oblique statement about the process of producing misanthropes. The *Dyskolos* does not forget that it is a comedy, of course; so Gorgias gains deliverance as a result of divine magnanimity and a series of accidents – again, a magical rescue, if ever there was one in Menander. But the trace of discomfort, the bitter after-taste, cannot be completely removed.

Furthermore, and most of all, there are many masterful touches in the play that give Knemon profundity and perspective, a definite hint of humanity beneath his beastly exterior. Knemon may be unlovable, but he is not unloved: the frantic reaction of Knemon's daughter during the rescue attempt at the well (ἐτιλλ', ἐκλα', ἐτυπτε τὸ στῆθος σφόδρα ('she was tearing her hair, crying, beating her chest with force', *Dysk.* 674); the sincere exasperation in Knemon's cry 'let me be how I want in my final days' (*Dysk.* 735); his belated embrace of Gorgias (*Dysk.* 722ff.), which resonates with heartfelt repentance; and Simikhe's genuine concern at the end (*Dysk.* 874–8) are some of such. Knemon is bothersome, but not vile, and certainly not a two-dimensional charlatan like, for example, the pimps brutalised at the end of Plautine plays. There is little doubt that Knemon's final torture is another one of those needless, avoidable pains that he has been inflicting upon himself his whole life

⁵⁸ See also [Chapter 2](#) on Gorgias' mask.

(*Dysk.* 101–2, 325ff.).⁵⁹ But self-inflicted pain does not equal moral guilt, certainly not of the average agelast sort. No easy light-heartedness can rub out the questions raised by the final scene.⁶⁰

Knemon and Gorgias stand for the social criticism of the play. These issues are summarily whitewashed in the beginning of Act v, when all parties come together in insouciant merriment, but they are allowed a sneak re-entry in the final scene. Everybody is happy; just as well – but Knemon remains a man apart. Knemon's obstinacy, as well as his forced rehabilitation by the slaves (the slave being a common metonymy of Comedy itself), and that at his most vulnerable and harmless, at his most pitiful and sympathetic, seems the fittest way to hint that in the end all is supposed to look OK with the world, but none of the real issues – again, systemic deficiencies intrinsic to Athenian society and culture – has actually been resolved. This play seems at pains to emphasise that its denouement is not only fictional, but laboured and artificial in the extreme.

I submit that Menander's comedy capitalises fully on the impression that it is a realistic imitation of life: it departs from realism in both senses of this ambiguous phrase. On the face of it, unlike Aristophanes' fictional worlds, which invite the audience to accept a construction where 'there is no logical or semantic difference between real, historical, mythical, or purely invented elements' (Ruffell (2011: 42), Menander's comedy appears (but only so) to be suppressing illogicality and improbability in favour of constructing a world that superficially seems to be governed by the laws of historical, physical, empirical and logical probability, and

⁵⁹ Menander's Knemon became a byword for masochism, cf. *Jul. Mis.* 8. On self-inflicted pain, compare Neoptolemus' admonitions to Philoctetes in *Soph. Phil.* 1314–20. As David Konstan points out to me, *per litteras*, the fact that such wilful behaviour is not pitiful is a commonplace in the literature of pity. However, not to deserve pity for *blabai hekousioi* ('self-inflicted damage') is not the same as to deserve cruel torture for the same.

⁶⁰ The scene would become a bit more than 'mildly disturbing' if, as Wiles (1984) contends, Menander did indeed design it to evoke political and ethical discussions of the day, even the actions and the destinies of contemporary politicians, such as the ill-fated Phokion and Demetrios of Phaleron.

thus to be a faithful mimesis of contemporary reality. Menander's comedy sets out to deal with a realistic sort of family crisis unfolding in a faithfully captured urban milieu, but only in order to contrive in the end, by turning adventitious events to the lovers' advantage and by inventing what can fairly be described as 'magical' solutions to real problems, a different kind of reality: a polis culture where lovers consummate their unions against all the odds, and where even acts of horrible violence, such as rape and assault, are blessings in disguise;⁶¹ where women are empowered to stand up to their fathers or other men who wish to dominate them, and assert control over their own affairs;⁶² where rich and poor, city folk and country folk unite in marriage; and where lost brothers re-emerge to save their sisters from lawful, yet unsavoury unions with their money-grabbing uncles. This fresh reality is unambiguously more expansive and more inclusive than the 'real' one beyond the theatre; a brave new world of comic ebullience, overlaid with a realistic façade, but in effect, *pace* Dionysius of Halicarnassus, self-consciously and poignantly out of synch with *to pragmatikon*. It is very important, therefore, to understand Menander's techniques of fictionalisation, in order to realise in how sophisticated a manner he exploits New Comedy's semblance of realism, and how deeply he implicates the spectator in reprocessing, out of this realistic departure, a fictional, 'possible' world. Menander's audience are deeply drawn into this process of fictionalising reality from within. Their complicity lies in the moment that they locate where precisely the realistic and the fictional drift apart and contemplate the discursive space that opens up in-between.

We are now in possession of a sophisticated study of Athenian Old Comedy by I. A. Ruffell (2011), who looks at Aristophanes and his palpably anti-realistic plays in the light of the 'possible

⁶¹ Cf. *Perik.* 1021–2, in the words of Glykera herself: 'now your drunken outrage has become the beginning of good things for us' (νῦν μὲν γὰρ ἡμῖν γέγονεν ἀρχὴ [πραγμάτων] ἀγαθῶν τὸ σὸν πάροιον).

⁶² Cf. *Perik.* 749, 'I know my interest better than anyone' (ἐγὼ δὲ τὰ μὲν ὀρίσθ'), spoken by another woman, who like Pamphile of the *Epitrepontes* is not to be forced or violated, but to be *convinced*. In an even stronger gesture of empowerment, Glykera is 'kyrios of her own self' (ἐαυτῆς κυρία, *Perik.* 497–8): counter-intuitively, the liminal status of *παλλακή* is turned into an advantage for this young woman.

worlds' theory,⁶³ in conjunction with theories of fictionality, semiotics, ideology, humour theory and cognitive linguistics. Especially illuminating is Ruffell's analysis of the processing of comic fictionality by theatrical audiences, in other words, how the audience do not merely suspend disbelief (this would be a purely passive stance), but actively construct fictional worlds and negotiate political and other 'serious' messages through the fantastical, the absurd and the impossible.⁶⁴ For all the difference between Aristophanes' and Menander's fictional worlds, the mechanisms of spectator complicity in the construction of these worlds are comparable, especially since, as the next section will argue, the mythical, in the form of tragic intertextuality, an integral part in many an Aristophanic fictional world, is crucially involved in the world-making processes of Menander, too.

Ruffell barely mentions Menander in his book, evidence perhaps of how paradoxical it sounds even to insinuate that Menander may partake in anti-realistic poetics and fictional world-making. Mark Payne, for his part, in his book *Theocritus and the Invention of Fiction* (2007), an earlier application of the 'possible worlds' theory in classical literary fiction, does deal with Menander briefly, when he comments on the following Scholion on Hom. Il. 14.342–51 (the translation is also Payne's):

τρῆῖς δέ εἰσι τρόποι, καθ' οὓς πᾶσα ποιήσις θεωρεῖται· ὁ μιμητικός τοῦ ἀληθοῦς, φιλοπάτωρ, μισογύνης, ἄπιστος, παρρησιαστής· ὁ κατὰ φαντασίαν τῆς ἀληθείας, ὃν δεῖ μὴ κατὰ μέρος ἐξετάζειν, οἷον, ὅτι ψυχαὶ γέγονται καὶ λαλοῦσι, πάντως ἔρεῖ

⁶³ On the theory of 'possible' worlds and literary criticism, the chief reference is Doležel (1998). Doležel (1988) and Ronen (1994) come in especially handy for drawing out the significant differences between 'possible worlds', an abstract philosophical term, and 'fictional worlds', a concrete literary-critical term used to describe a specific kind of possible world, 'the artifacts produced by aesthetic activities such as painting, cinema, and storytelling' (Herman 1999: 378). 'Fictional worlds' do constitute perhaps 'an inadvertent metaphorisation of a concept whose original (philosophical and literary) nonfigurative significance is far from self-evident' (Ronen 1994: 7). Yet as Thomas Pavel, one of the prime exponents of the possible worlds theory in fiction, noted: 'the notion of world as an ontological metaphor for fiction remains too appealing to be dismissed' (Pavel 1986: 50). On possible worlds in philosophy, see Lewis (1986). Rich further bibliography is provided by Ruffell (2011).

⁶⁴ Cf. Ruffell (2011: 44): 'What the audience see on stage does not constitute the fictional world of the play or even a part of that fictional world ... The audience is make-believing a (flexible) space, a word and a course of events on the basis of what they are seeing and hearing.'

Menander's New Comedy between reality and textuality

τις καὶ γλῶσσαν ἔχουσι καὶ βρόγχον· τρίτος δὲ ὁ καθ' ὑπέρθεσιν ἀληθείας καὶ φαντασίαν, Κύκλωπες, Λαιστρυγόνες καὶ ταῦτα τὰ περὶ θεῶν.

There are three rubrics under which all poetry may be considered. The first represents reality directly, for example when it portrays 'the man who loves his father', 'the misogynist', 'the untrustworthy man', or 'the loudmouth'. The second proceeds by way of fantasy upon reality, and one should not probe the details of this type too closely, as when, for example, someone claims that because souls eat and talk they must surely have a tongue and throat. The third exaggerates and goes beyond reality, as is the case with the Cyclopes, the Laistrygonians, and these things [Zeus and Hera's lovemaking] that have to do with the gods.

Payne's comments on the Scholion (2007: 8) constitute, in my view, a missed critical opportunity:

Since *The Misogynist* and *The Untrustworthy Man* are known to be the titles of plays by Menander (the latter is also the title of one of Theophrastus' *Characters*), it is evident that the scholiast has in mind New Comedy, with its representation of universality through omnipresent human types, as his example of poetry that represents reality directly ... While Aristotle focuses his discussion of poetic fiction on Homer and tragedy, for the scholiast it is evidently New Comedy that functions best as mimetic art, both because its agents are character types who are easily recognizable as universals of real-world human behavior and because these types are presented within a *fictional world that has minimal deviation from the real world* [my emphasis]. As Aristophanes of Byzantium so famously put it, 'O Menander and Life, which of you imitated the other?'

Further down in his book (pp. 51–3), commenting on the prologue of the *Dyskolos*, Payne locates Menander's (minimal, in his view) world-making in the transformation of geographical details from real particulars into fictional universals:

As in Euripides, imaginary deixis extends the play's fictional geography from the stage out into the world of the audience, superimposing itself upon it. Menander, however, uses this technique as a way to have his audience reimagine this world as the site of universal stories, like the one he is about to tell them (p. 53).

Menander's world-making only starts from this point, nevertheless, and it is much more extensive and pervasive than Payne allows. Menander's realistic geography offers the springboard for jumping into a world where reality magically expands to accommodate the unimaginable. Working from within a realistic guise, Menander's Tyche (or Agnoia, or other concrete or abstract powers) constructs an alternative possible world.

This, too, is a form of ‘transduction’.⁶⁵ The Phyle of the *Dyskolos* is already fictionalised, as it constitutes part of a mimetic society that appears to reflect, but does not coincide with, the historical one that provides its model. From the very beginning of the *Dyskolos*, however, it is made clear that a fictionalisation of a second order is at play. This Phyle is after all not so much the space of Knemon as the space of Pan, a locus closer to the experience of Plato’s *Phaedrus* than to a ‘realistic’ play about a grouchy father and an urban fop bumping heads. Pan is a *daemon meridianus*⁶⁶ and, as such, he is a territorial divinity who holds sway over a special enchanted chronotope, a ‘holy place’ (θεῖος τόπος),⁶⁷ like the Ilissos valley in the *Phaedrus*,⁶⁸ the pastoral utopia of *Daphnis and Chloe* or, indeed, like Menander’s Phyle. The noted absence of topicality in Menander’s otherwise realistic-looking Phyle – the Macedonian garrison stationed there by 316 BC is nowhere to be seen in the *Dyskolos* – has been variously interpreted both as a political and as an apolitical stance, as a gesture of resistance and non-recognition similar to the absence of the Romans from the Roman-occupied world of Pausanias or Achilles Tatius, or as a confirmation of New Comedy’s escapism into *res privata*. This same absence, however, can mark out Phyle as Pan’s special heterotopia,⁶⁹ or in Lubomir Doležel’s terms, *heterocosmos*: whoever trespasses into this singular space-time, should they be the herald Philippides (Hdt. 6.105) or Socrates or

⁶⁵ Payne (2007: 3–4): ‘the process by which characters and situations can be transported from preexisting fictional worlds into new ones, where they are fully independent of their predecessor’.

⁶⁶ See, e.g., Theoc. 1.15–8, *Anth. Pal.* 7.196.

⁶⁷ ‘Noon demons’ have been treated exhaustively by Caillois (1937).

⁶⁸ This is how Socrates describes the effect of the location on his mind and soul (Pl. *Phaedr.* (238c4–d4): ‘(SO) “Well, Phaedrus, my friend, does it seem to you, too, as it does to me, that I am under some sort of divine inspiration?” (PHAE) “Yes, indeed, Socrates; speech is flowing out of you beyond your usual measure.” (SO) “So be quiet and listen to me. This place truly seems to be holy, so if in the course of my speech I often seem possessed by the Nymphs, do not be surprised. For my words now are already not very different from dithyrambs.” (PHAE) “What you say is very true” (Ἀτάρ, ὦ φίλε Φαίδρε, δοκῶ τι σοί, ὥσπερ ἑμαυτῷ, θεῖον πάθος πεπονθέναι; (ΦΑΙ.) Πάνυ μὲν οὖν, ὦ Σώκράτης, παρὰ τὸ εἰωθὸς εὐροῖά τις σε εἴληφεν. (ΣΩ.) Σιγῇ τοίνυν μου ἄκουε. τῷ ὄντι γὰρ θεῖος ἔοικεν ὁ τόπος εἶναι, ὥστε ἔάν ἄρα πολλάκις νυμφόληπτος προσιόντος τοῦ λόγου γένωμαι, μὴ θαυμάσῃς· τὰ νῦν γὰρ οὐκέτι πόρρω διθυράμβων φθέγγομαι. (ΦΑΙ.) Ἀληθέστατα λέγεις).

⁶⁹ On the term, see Foucault (1986).

the chorus of the *Dyskolos*, enters a realm of inescapable magic, where everything works in favour of the comic resolution. The chorus of the *Dyskolos* is a group of Παιανιστᾶί, as the papyrus reads, or Πανιστᾶί, as Lloyd-Jones emended and most modern editors print.⁷⁰ Panistai or Paianistai regardless, the chorus can hardly, in any case, elude their association with Pan, inasmuch as they perform in a space dominated by the god. Anyway, it is not so much who the chorus are, but what they do that marks out their relationship to Pan: and if Marshall (2002) is right to suggest that the group of extras playing the entourage of Sostratos' mother in *Dysk.* 427–41 are actually the choristers interacting with the actors, then with a simple theatrical sleight of hand the chorus transform themselves from a bunch of irrelevant revellers into worshippers of the dominant god. This potential continuity between stage and orchestra – not to be taken for granted in the fourth century – would be a potent gesture underpinning the symbolic significance of Pan in this play and his dominance over the theatrical space.

Menander's spaces, therefore, resulting from the transduction of realistic locations into spaces where urban dramas become universal metaphors,⁷¹ can be as fictionalised as the denouements of his stories. When these spaces become intertextualised as well (as we shall see in the next section and, in more detail, in Chapter 2), the departure from realism becomes even starker. Menander's fictionalisation, however, is of a special kind, dissimilar both from the self-reflexively incoherent 'impossible worlds' of Aristophanes,⁷² inasmuch as Menander's fictional spaces stick to their realistic mask and allow the improbable to intrude only so subtly. They are also different, even more starkly, from the 'fully fictional' bucolic

⁷⁰ On the editorial issue, see Handley (1965: 171–4); Gomme and Sandbach (1973) *ad loc.*

⁷¹ See the next section for the role played by mythic and, indeed, tragic archetypes in this universality.

⁷² Cf. Ruffell (2011: 35): 'Impossible worlds are those that involve paradoxes or other logical contradictions . . . Old Comedy uses *both* types of impossibility – both paradox and contradiction, and metatheatre. It structures its plots and worlds around and out of jokes that are paradoxical or require a doubled or multiplied identity, which puts extreme pressure on the coherence of the fictional world of the play. The persistent metatheatricality of the plays means that its characters can appear to be easily aware of their fictional status within a fictional world or that there is an audience helping to create that world.'

fields of Theocritus, precisely inasmuch as that realistic mask of the setting, of the characters and of the plot constantly invites an interface with the world outside their fictional limits. This interface is all-important. Menander, indeed, recasts the historical Phyle as a fictional world, where Pan's grace is extended upon the darling of the Nymphs, but he never removes the scaffolding fully; indeed, he makes a point of not disguising its artificiality. The contrast between a world of ethical verisimilitude, topographical exactness and social realism, a world, in other words, that is *mimētikos tou alēthous*, as the Homeric scholiast would put it, and a world where, exactly *kath' hyperthesin alētheias kai phantasian*, going beyond the boundaries of reality into fiction, Pan steps in to correct that world's skewed reality, makes for Menander's special kind of theatrical fantasy. Menander's is a fictional world, which expands reality in a manner that would seem awfully giddy, even corny, if it did not gain pungency by exposing its mechanical nature. The efficacy of this fictional world of Menander's as 'a valuable cognitive tool for understanding the world in which we actually live and act'⁷³ relies precisely on mapping the fissures between the generically conditioned resolutions of the plot and the real-life analogues of the comic crisis. Or, in the words of Douglas Robinson and Ellen Gardiner, it relies on 'reading beyond the ending'.⁷⁴

In lieu of a final conclusion to this section, let us be allowed a touch of hyperbole. Menander's comedy is, at the end of the day, almost as fantastical as Aristophanes'. There is significant generic continuity in this matter, much of the same emphasis on the fictional and the alternative, on possible worlds. Undoubtedly, the process of offsetting the shortcomings of reality by constructing a fresh one, or of using 'the grotesque, anti-real, impossible, and absurd to say something experientially or intellectually meaningful',⁷⁵ is obviously much more contained and discreet in Menander compared with Aristophanes' unadulterated, boisterous

⁷³ Payne (2007: 1).

⁷⁴ Robinson (1992). 'Reading Beyond the Ending' is the title of chapter 6 of their book.

⁷⁵ Ruffell (2011: 16).

comic fantasies with their dung beetles, cloud-cuckoo lands and journeys to Hades. It is also sprinkled, however – and this is, to my mind, the punch – with a dash of understated, ideologically fraught sadness. This ambivalence, certainly, is not altogether absent from Aristophanes' endings, either, if we remember plays like the *Clouds*, the *Birds*, etc.: but it is precisely the stark antithesis between the meticulous realism of Menander's settings, characters and social concerns, and the fictional, artificial resolution of his plots that makes his denouements all the more ambiguous compared with Aristophanes', and ultimately totally distinct.

The Glykera of *Perikeiromene*, to recall one last example, is eventually restored to her rightful social condition as a marriageable citizen woman; her disenfranchisement is corrected, her union with Polemon is salvaged, and she forgives her assaulter (συγγνώμης τετύχηκα[ς, 'you have been forgiven', *Perik.* 1023). All is good with the world again. But it cannot escape the observant spectator that at the end of the play, as mordantly as in the beginning – most momentarily in the fortunate moment of the *anagnorisis* in Act iv (*Perik.* 708ff.), but also during the reconciliation of the two and the *eggyē* ceremony⁷⁶ in Act v (*Perik.* 1006ff.), and despite the fact that in the latter scene she has otherwise slipped into the new clothes that her long-lost father has provided (*Perik.* 991–2) – Glykera must still be wearing her custom-made mask with the ravished hair: a constant and inescapable reminder of the soldier's rash vehemence and criminal intemperance, his hubris (cf. *Perik.* 722–3: [εἰς ἑτέραν τινά/ ὕβριζέτω τὸ λοιπόν, 'let him vent his outrageous violence towards some other girl from now on']). The *anagnorisis*, once more, whitewashed the consequences; joyous endings are conducive to blissful oblivion anyway (not least because the spectators watching a comedy are indeed predisposed to let go of all the dissonant echoes). But the scars Polemon caused continue to be there, physically present on the mask. The bitter aftertaste is the trademark flavour of Menander.

⁷⁶ On *eggyē*, see A. R. W. Harrison (1968: 3–9); Todd (1993: 12–14).

The mirrors of stories

As I suggested earlier, there is another major way in which Menander's 'realism' is compromised, or at least significantly qualified: the fact that his plots are systematically the mirrors of stories: of mythical archetypes, as well as, predominantly, of tragic narrative structures, and in some cases even of specific tragic performances and plots. In [Chapter 2](#), delving deeper into the historical process that made New Comedy what we can call a hybrid genre, we will suggest that much of this dynamic polysemy is played out visually just as much as verbally. Our purpose in this section is primarily to show how Menander's performances can oscillate between reality and textuality, just as easily as they can blend reality with ideological fantasy.

Tragedy is ubiquitous in Menander, graduating with ease from casual references, passing quotations or the use of 'tragic' language to the most sustained mirroring between the urban exterior of the plot and the tragic archetypes that lie behind it. The latter is sometimes denied by scholars, who prefer to look at the tragic intertext as 'a temporary comic mode . . . not one permanently indulged in, but one condiment in the sauce, as it were'.⁷⁷ But what, then, should we make of evidence like Hyginus' *Fabula* 187? The correspondences between this *fabula*, the Euripidean play it is putatively reproducing, the *Alope*, and Menander's *Epitrepontes* are too striking to miss, and they constitute a case of structural parallelism of the most pervasive sort:

(1) *Alope* Cercyonis filia formosissima cum esset, **Neptunus eam compressit**. qua ex compressione **peperit infantem** quem **inscio patre nutrici dedit exponendum**. qui cum expositus esset, **equa** uenit et ei lac praestabat. (2) quidam

⁷⁷ Quoted from Furley (2009: 2–8), who dedicates to the subject an otherwise illuminating and refreshing section looking at Menander and tragedy via the sitcom *Friends*: 'The tragic touches are short in duration, just enough to alert the audience to the target genre and to heighten the humour of the present scene. But rapidly the allusion is dropped and Menander passes on to another source of humour, or, later in the play, to a quite different tragic "butt"' (p. 3). Compare the comment of Gomme and Sandbach (1973: 651 *ad Sik.* 176ff): 'There is a parallel between this speech and that of the *Orestes* in that both give an account of a debate before a popular assembly that decides the fate of a man and a woman. The resemblance ends there so far as incidents go, but 182 contains a verbal quotation. The likeness was no doubt intended to catch the notice of a literary spectator, but it is fleeting and its importance not to be exaggerated.'

pastor equam persecutus uidit infantem atque eum **sustulit**, qui ueste regia indutum cum in casam tulisset, **alter compastor rogauit ut sibi eum infantem donaret**. (3) ille ei donauit **sine ueste**; cum autem inter eos **iurgium** esset, quod qui puerum acceperat insignia ingenuitatis reposceret, ille autem non daret, contententes ad regem Cercyonem uenerunt et contendere coeperunt. (4) ille autem qui infantem donatum acceperat, repetere insignia coepit, quae cum allata essent, et **agnosceret Cercyon** ea esse ex ueste scissa filiae suae, Alopes nutrix timens regi indicium fecit infantem eum Alopes esse, qui filiam iussit ad necem includi, infantem autem proici. (5) quem iterum equa nutriebat; pastores iterum inuentum sustulerunt, sentientes eum deorum numine educari, atque nutrierunt, nomenque ei imposuerunt Hippothoum . . .

(1) Alope, the daughter of Kerkyon, a maiden of exquisite beauty, was raped by Poseidon. As a result of this rape, she gave birth to an infant, whom, unbeknownst to her father, she handed over to her nurse to expose. When the child was exposed, a mare came and fed the child her milk. (2) Some shepherd, who had followed the mare, saw the infant and took him in. When he brought the child to his house swaddled in royal garments, a fellow shepherd asked to be granted the child as his own. (3) The first shepherd obliged, but he did not give over the garments. A dispute broke out between them, because the shepherd who received the child demanded also the tokens of his noble birth, but the other refused. Arguing about this, they brought their squabble to King Kerkyon. (4) The one who was granted the child continued to demand the tokens, which were brought in. Kerkyon realized that they were shreds from his daughter's clothes. Alope's nurse panicked and confessed to the king that the child was indeed Alope's. The king ordered his daughter to be imprisoned until she died and the infant to be exposed again. (5) For the second time the child was nursed by a mare. For the second time also he was discovered and taken in by the shepherds, who realized that to nurture him was the will of the gods. They raised him and gave him the name Hippothous . . .

Kerkyon's daughter is raped by Poseidon and begets a child: Pamphile suffers the same ghastly fate, only her own Poseidon is Charisios, her future husband. Both women expose their child in secret from their fathers. A mare nurses Alope's child, who is then picked up by a shepherd. Another shepherd sees the regalia accompanying the child and wants to claim it (and them!) for himself. The first shepherd is willing to give the child, but not the royal garments, to the second shepherd; a quarrel ensues, and the shepherds, like Menander's Daos and Syriskos in their own very similar case, resort to arbitration (Kerkyon's and Smikrines'). This is where the obligatory genre-specific differences arise. Kerkyon recognises his grandson's royal tokens (bits and shreds from his

daughter's garment). He orders that his daughter be put to death and his grandson be exposed for a second time. Smikrines, on the contrary, will not recognise the tokens, he will issue the right decision (child and tokens stay together), and thus he, who is adamant that his daughter should divorce her husband, will save both the child and the marriage unawares – another one of those wonderfully unexpected, 'magical' saves in the comedy of Menander. It is hard to refuse that the *Epitrepontes* reads like a civic, comic version of the old tragic myth.

Menander's comedy flags its affinities with tragedy constantly. Numerous cases of comic and tragic interplay are conveniently collected in A. G. Katsouris' *Tragic Patterns in Menander*.⁷⁸ Still, so much of both genres has been lost that, for sure, tragic (perhaps better: tragedic) echoes must be still lurking completely untraceable and indecipherable behind the most unassuming Menandrian scenes. Easily discernible are the cases marked by explicit mention and/or direct quotation, such as the messenger scene in the *Sikyonioides* (176ff.),⁷⁹ the arbitration scene in the *Epitrepontes* (218ff.), or Demeas' showering Nikeratos with dubious consolations in Act IV of the *Samia* (589ff.).⁸⁰ Scholars have also paid close attention to instances that may lack the verbatim citation of tragic verses, but are marked by such unmistakable signposts as elevated diction or 'tragic' interjections (οἴμοι, τάλας, etc.). However, as this book hopes to show, it would be a grave mistake to perpetuate the old fallacy that intertextuality can be assumed (and utilised in interpretation) only in the presence of unambiguous intentionality. Intertextuality is as much a mode of reception as of production in literature, of spectating as much as of playwriting. Furthermore, it would be equally fallacious to believe that in such a composite medium as the theatre only verbal signs and of such only overt references can alert the audience to the referentiality of the play. Menander's

⁷⁸ Katsouris (1975a).

⁷⁹ Blanchard (2009), in his Budé edition, opts not to print Merkelbach's supplement, which reconstructs the Euripidean distich from *Orestes*.

⁸⁰ In a manner very similar to the blandishments in Timocles, fr. 6, where again the tragic parallels are supposed to be *parapsychai phrontidōn*, a consolation for man's many sufferings.

engagement with tragedy, I submit, must be understood as an all-encompassing, sustained theatrical phenomenon.

Tragic paradigms can play in the background of the most mundane comic situations in Menander; they can obtrude themselves upon scenes least suspect of intertextual overdetermination, most probably to an extent that we can no longer fathom. There are, of course, degrees and variations. In some cases the connections can be of the most generic kind: not exactly 'allusions' so much as mnemonic concurrences, virtually automatised connections generated by the 'hybridity' of New Comedy as a genre, the fact that it conflates, evolutionally speaking, both the comic and the tragic traditions. Even such casual cases of alignment, however, can acquire mythopoeic dynamic and provide comic perspective: 'another comic angle on the proceedings', as David Furley puts it.⁸¹ Richard Hunter, for instance, sees 'in Knemon's charge to Gorgias (*Dysk.* 729ff.) to find a husband for his daughter . . . a kind of comfortingly civic and comic version of the dying Heracles' awesome and mysterious charge to his son at the end of Sophocles' *Trachiniai* to marry Iole'.⁸² A few scenes earlier in the same play, at the beginning of Act III (*Dysk.* 430ff.), a frantic mother scurries onto the stage wishing to perform apotropaic sacrifice, because ominous dreams have terrified her about the fate of her son, who is away on a hunting trip – a literal one, although he ends up 'hunting' Knemon's daughter. This again, to the mind of a spectator much more loaded with theatrical memory than we perchance can imagine, could be reminiscent of such an unexpected tragic parallel as Aeschylus' queen in the *Persians*.⁸³ Such associations may not always be of paramount thematic significance. It can even be debated whether they are 'there' at

⁸¹ Furley (2009: 6).

⁸² Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004: 428). In the same scene, Knemon's entry on the *ekkyklēma* has been cogently connected with Euripides' *Hippolytos*. In the previous section we suggested that the *Trachiniai*, in an ambiguous way, may also be behind the injured Knemon's entry at the beginning of the final scene.

⁸³ Remember that in the *Persians*, too, as often in military narratives, Xerxes' expedition to Greece is wrapped in images of *hunting* among others: Xerxes fervently wanted to hunt Athens (*A. Pers.* 233: ὁλλὰ μὲν ἵμεῖρ' ἐμὸς ποῖς τήνδε θηρᾶσαι πόλιν;), and in his expedition the dogs of war are barking after the young 'hunter', dutiful and obedient (*A. Pers.* 13: νέον δ' ἄνδρα βαυζει). On the textual and other problems dogging this last passage, see Garvie (2009: 53–4).

all, if we stick to the guns of an authorially controlled, verbally signposted poetics of allusion disregarding the dynamics of audience response.⁸⁴ We should avoid doing that. Tragedy and New Comedy now share a common theatrical repository, which can be energised in numberless ways by the audience during the theatrical event.

It would be useful, before proceeding to further theoretical analysis, to look in detail at one example of such an unassuming and utterly comic scene, which may well be winking, tongue-in-cheek, at a tragic parallel, and a surprising one for that matter. As far as I know, this connection, between *Dysk.* 345–92 and Euripides *Bacchae*, has not been previously proposed. One point should be clear: in the Greek *koilon*, which seated a multifarious community of spectators steeped in a theatrical tradition already comprising thousands of comic and tragic plays by the time of Menander (some of which were now also available as books), such associations establish interpretive possibilities, a range of likely responses, that should not be summarily discarded or criminalised. The texture of Menander's performance is bound to have looked much thicker to the contemporary spectator than it does to the modern scholar.

In *Dysk.* 392, Sostratos decides to head towards Knemon's fields. This is an alarming development: Sostratos is endorsing a course of action potentially threatening for his personal safety, to say nothing of its ruinous repercussions for the romantic plot. To meet Knemon face to face is nothing short of madness – or should we say *mania*? At the point where Sostratos is the least 'conducive to the fulfilment of the romance',⁸⁵ he seems to be driven by Panic frenzy at the utmost. In the meantime, of course, Pan has taken steps to avert the 'tragedy': he sent an alarming dream to Sostratos' mother, which will soon bring her along with a sacrificial party to Phyle. This will cause Knemon to stay at home – but this

⁸⁴ For an example of such scepticism, see Katsouris (1975a: 3–10), a section entitled 'Overemphasis of tragic influence'. The last critical term, 'influence', is suggestive of the rationale behind these doubts.

⁸⁵ Zagagi (1994: 159).

is not yet known. Sostratos' exit, leaving the stage empty for a moment,⁸⁶ creates, always by comic standards, a sense of impending doom.⁸⁷

The looming danger, the precarious, climactic moment, the presence of a divinity of possession, the woods and the wilderness, the emphasis on vision and spectacle (to see and be seen): the parallelisms, as well as the reversals, are such that the association of *Dysk.* 345–92 with the famous 'robing scene'⁸⁸ in Euripides' *Bacchae* 802ff. seems, to my mind, to invite itself. In the Euripidean scene, Dionysus proposes to Pentheus that they should go out to the mountains, for Pentheus to see the Bacchantes at work (the spectator will turn spectacle at his fall).⁸⁹ In the *Dyskolos*, where the divinity acts through human agents, Gorgias and Daos propose that the two of them and Sostratos should go out to Knemon's field, for Sostratos to be seen by Knemon at work (Sostratos, now spectacle, will subsequently be spectator at Knemon's literal fall). In both cases, a shift is proposed from civilisation (the polis) to the 'wild', to encounter the denizens of the wild (let us remember that to the eyes of many characters in this play Knemon is a 'beast'). If Pentheus fails to see that his appearance near the Bacchantes will be fatal to his life, Sostratos, too, 'fails to see that his appearance [near Knemon] will be fatal to his chances'.⁹⁰ Pentheus will be dismembered; Sostratos' 'dismemberment' is enacted in Daos' imagination (*Dysk.* 366–7). The chorus in the *Bacchae*, too, visualises Pentheus' sacrifice *ante eventum* (977–96).

Analysed in detail, the two scenes are similar in structure:

(a) *Person A makes the proposal. Person B accepts the proposal with burning enthusiasm.* When Dionysus mentions the plan (signalled by his famous interjection ἄ, *Bacch.* 810), Pentheus, burning with *megas erōs*, 'fervent desire' (*Bacch.* 813), cannot

⁸⁶ For as much time as was needed for the actors playing Daos and Gorgias to come back as Sikon and Getas, respectively; a minimum interval, but long enough for the audience to take in what they have seen. For the whole question of the empty stage within acts, see Belardinelli (1990).

⁸⁷ Notice, nonetheless, how the empty stage is immediately filled by a cook. According to Webster (1973: 296), this is 'always a good omen'.

⁸⁸ See Segal (1982: 223–32). ⁸⁹ See Foley (1980: 122). ⁹⁰ Handley (1965: 193).

wait to follow the god's lead: 'move as quickly as possible; there is no time to waste' (ἀγ' ὥς τάχιστα, τοῦ χρόνου δέ σοι φθονῶ, *Bacch.* 820). Sostratos' erotic exasperation takes the twist of a supplication: 'I beg of you, help me out' (ἀλλ', ἀντιβολῶ, συναγωνισαί μοι, *Dysk.* 362). The king would be willing to pay 'thousands of pounds of gold' to see the Bacchantes (μυρίον . . . χρυσοῦ σταθμόν, *Bacch.* 812). Sostratos is twice as eager to have himself seen by Knemon, when Gorgias tries to talk sense into him: 'the arguments you employ to dissuade me urge me twice as strongly to do the very thing' (οἷς ἀποτρέπεις νυνὶ γὰρ ὥς οἷε με σύ, | τούτοις παρώξυμ' εἰς τὸ πρᾶγμα διπλασίως, *Dysk.* 382–3). He, too, places himself completely in Gorgias' hands: 'I am ready to march where you say' (βαδίζειν <εἰμ'> ἔτοιμος οἷ λέγεις, *Dysk.* 361). In fact, he is so carried away that he repeats his exhortation twice: 'let's proceed where you say' (προάγωμεν οἷ λέγεις, *Dysk.* 363).

(b) *Person A problematises his proposal, making sure that Person B has all his facts laid out before him before getting into the venture.* Dionysus first wants to know why Pentheus wants to go through with this: 'why are you so passionate about this?' (τί δ' εἰς ἔρωτα τοῦδε πέπτωκας μέγαν, *Bacch.* 813). Then he wants to make sure Pentheus is willing to put himself through grief: 'are you sure you would make a sweet spectacle out of what would cause you bitter pain?' (ὅμως δ' ἴδοις ἂν ἡδέως ἅ σοι πικρά, *Bacch.* 815). In the *Dyskolos*, Daos (if Sandbach's attribution is correct), with a surprised τί οὖν wants to make sure he can really believe what he is hearing from Sostratos (*Dysk.* 363–4). Then Gorgias asks: 'why do you force yourself to endure hardship?' (τί κακοπαθεῖν σαυτὸν βιάζει, *Dysk.* 371).⁹¹ Pentheus has to realise that he runs the risk of being discovered and put to death: 'they will track you down, even if you go by stealth' (ἀλλ' ἐξιχνεύουσιν σε, κἂν ἔλθῃς λάθρα, *Bacch.* 817). Correspondingly, Sostratos should

⁹¹ Handley (1965: 195) wants Gorgias to address this question to Daos rather than to Sostratos. Gomme and Sandbach (1973: 191) believe that the addressee is Sostratos, but that the remark is an aside. There is no dramatic need for an answer, however: Gorgias had made the same remark to Sostratos in 348 and got his answer there: for Sostratos this is not *kakopathein* if he will end up having his girl (349).

know that he will definitely have to suffer clod bombardment and a torrent of abuse.

(c) *The dangers can be allayed if Person B follows Person A's instructions and agrees to be disguised.* Dionysus asks Pentheus to remove his royal gown and put on a woman's dress (*Bacch.* 821, 828); to lose the sceptre in favour of the *thyrsos* (*Bacch.* 835). Sostratos will have to remove his urban *chlanis* (a woolly upper garment considered slightly effeminate)⁹² and put on a farmer's *diphthera* (jerkin made of leather), lose all his urban paraphernalia in favour of the rustic mattock (*Dysk.* 375). There is some disagreement among scholars whether or not the change of costume in the *Dyskolos* takes place onstage (as it does in the *Bacchae*).⁹³ However, I believe this is exactly the sort of loaded 'intervisuality' that Menander would not have resisted (for the term, see Chapter 2). Part of Sostratos' disguise certainly does happen onstage: there is no reason, I think, why Daos should repair the wall first (*Dysk.* 377–8) and not exit with the two youths to the fields right away other than for the exchange of the mattock to actually happen before the eyes of the audience. Why then not the whole thing? The audience has to see the incongruity of a delicate city boy holding the heavy farm utensil (*Dysk.* 390–2), just like the audience of the *Bacchae* should see the virile king change into female attire. This would truly be a piquant piece of intervisual spectacle.

The divergences between the two scenes are equally suggestive: Menander's usual technique is to present 'incomplete' or 'imperfect' analogies between comic texts and tragic intertexts: the point often lies in the twist. The terrible power of the *Bacchae* scene relies on the unequivocal hierarchy of dominant god and dominated mortal. This clear pecking order is absent from the *Dyskolos*: here, it is well-nigh impossible to distinguish if in the end Sostratos is acting on Gorgias' cue, if the move is Sostratos' own idea, or if both youths succumb to the wiles of

⁹² See D. 21.133, 36.45.

⁹³ The *editio princeps*, Stoessl (1965: 105–6), and Gomme and Sandbach (1973: 191), maintain that Sostratos' change of costume takes place on stage. Handley (1965: 193ff.) finds this 'attractive'.

the slave Daos.⁹⁴ At *Dysk.* 352–7, Gorgias suggests approaching Knemon as a non-option of sorts, which would prove to Sostratos that his aspirations are pure daydreaming. Sostratos' fervour, however (remember Pentheus' *megas erōs*), transforms Gorgias' casual thought (a form of *schēma adynaton*, as it were) into a course of action finally put into words by Daos (if the OCT's line attribution is correct, and it probably is). The *Dyskolos* transforms the element of trickery found in the *Bacchae* into a hilarious mutual entrapment of the comic agents, who seem to rush headlong *alla bocca del lupo*.⁹⁵ The under-current of Panic possession cannot be underestimated here, although Pan's overarching presence in this play, as noted above, is routinely played down. In the *Dyskolos*, as in the *Bacchae*, there is a divine force pushing 'to the mountain, to the mountain' (εἰς ὄρος εἰς ὄρος, *Bacch.* 116). Comic resolution, of course, is predestined, when Sostratos moves towards the 'beast' while, at the same time, the 'beast' moves away from Sostratos.

A central theme of the *Dyskolos*, *autarkeia* (on the notion see above), is also not unrelated to the *Bacchae*. In Euripides' play, according to Seaford,⁹⁶ Dionysus is the force that allays the household's tendency towards self-sufficiency and self-isolation in favour of the communality of the polis. David Konstan has seen Sostratos' love, inspired by Pan, as the manifestation of the same integrating force, only not through destruction but through marriage.⁹⁷ Destruction needs the beast at large; marriage demands it at bay. Dionysus unleashes the beasts on Pentheus. Pan sees to it, that the 'beast' is locked in his nest.⁹⁸ The *Bacchae*-intertext

⁹⁴ Daos does not intend to harm Sostratos, but he certainly does not wish him well either: he hopes Sostratos will be crippled enough by hard work to leave them alone (*Dysk.* 371–4).

⁹⁵ David Konstan, *per litteras*, suggests to me the following tantalising alternative: 'Can we perhaps infer, from the intertextual and intervisual reminiscence, that there is a sly effort on Gorgias' part to encourage Sostratos? This would make a good deal of sense, and lend to Gorgias a subtlety that is missing in modern characterizations of him. So Gorgias, who would after all want his sister to marry a wealthy young man, may not be quite the pawn of the gods that he seems.'

⁹⁶ Seaford (1993). ⁹⁷ Konstan (1995: 99).

⁹⁸ It may be relevant to remember that a bewildered Congrio describes Euclio's house in Plautus' *Aulularia* as a *Bacchanal* (*Aul.* 406–12). For the similarities between Euclio and Knemon, see Marcovich (1977) and Hunter (1981).

brings together Knemon and the Bacchants in the paradigm of the 'beast out there'. This is, indeed, an intricate way to conjure up all at once the terror that is Knemon and the blessing that is Pan, the beastly god.

That Menander sustains an intertextual dialogue with other texts and other genres, and particularly the tragedy of Euripides,⁹⁹ was already common stock for scholars in antiquity.¹⁰⁰ In modern scholarship, discussion of Menander's approach to tragedy had been a controversial issue even before Menander's resurfacing from the sands of Egypt. Naturally, debate has flared up ever since. But it is one thing to locate the phenomenon and another to construct the proper hermeneutic model for it. Until the 1950s, the study of Menander's appropriation of tragedy comprised mainly *Quellenforschungen* and *Motivstudien*; that is, passive, personalised and author-driven models of 'influence', 'imitation' or 'debt', focusing on the 'what' rather than on the 'how' and the 'why' of the issue.¹⁰¹ From the 1960s, but mainly from the 1980s, onwards, however, the gradual accretion of more and more Menander in much better shape thanks to acute critical editing and supplementation, and more importantly the overall awakening of classicists to modern critical methodologies,¹⁰² geared Menandrian scholarship on the matter towards more interactive models of appropriation, exploitation or

⁹⁹ Recently Lamagna (2007) made a good case for Menandrian intertextuality with Homeric epic as well.

¹⁰⁰ Aristophanes of Byzantium is reported to have written a treatise entitled 'Menander's parallels and the sources from which he stole' (Παράλληλοι Μενάνδρου καὶ ἀφ' ὧν ἔκλεψεν, test. 76 K.-A.). A similar book of scholarly detective work is ascribed again by Porphyrius (test. 81) to Latinus ('On material not belonging to Menander', Περὶ τῶν οὐκ ἰδίων Μενάνδρου, in six whole books!). References to Menander's *parallēloi* are bound to have occurred in the commentaries written by Didymus (test. 78), Timachides (test. 77), Soteridas (test. 79) and Homer Sellius (test. 80). Test. 82 adds two more uncertain names of Menandrian commentators.

¹⁰¹ See Meineke (1841); Frantz (1891); Sehr (1912); Wagner (1913); Moore (1916); Andrewes (1924); G. F. Davidson (1932); Del Grande (1952); Pertusi (1953); Fraenkel (1955); Martin (1958); and, more comprehensively, Katsouris (1975a).

¹⁰² For a brief assessment of Menandrian studies in the twentieth century, with an emphasis on the new perspectives, which gradually appeared from the 1980s onwards, see the introduction ('New Comedy under new light') in Petrides and Papaioannou (2010).

transformation.¹⁰³ The most important advances in the study of Menander's interaction with tragedy stemmed from the realisation that the 'tragic patterns' in Menander are neither merely the results of passive 'influence' or slavish 'imitation' particularly of Euripides, nor is tragedy a foreign body to be 'parodied' or debunked in the manner of older comedy. The qualitative difference, scholars now realise, is that New Comedy's relationship to tragedy is no longer parasitic or just competitive; tragedy is an integrated mode to be utilised for a variety of tonal effects, not necessarily 'comic', but more complex and variegated.¹⁰⁴

The most important among these effects is the antithesis between the subjectivity of the character, who views his situation as a tragedy, and the objectivity of the comic situation at large.¹⁰⁵ Stephen Halliwell in his monumental treatise on Greek laughter saw this duality of perspective (which he termed 'perspectivism')

¹⁰³ Best exemplified by Hunter (1985) and Hurst (1990). Important general overviews are also those of Lanza (1993); Gutzwiller (2000); with especial emphasis on the *Aspis*, Vogt-Spira (2001); and Cusset (2003). The approach of Iversen (1998), who sees New Comedy's relationship to tragedy under the light of Harold Bloom's intentionalist 'anxiety of influence' theory, is, I think, less convincing, but still of interest. Issues of tragic intertextuality in individual plays are tackled: (a) regarding the *Epitrepontes*, by W. S. Anderson (1982); Stockert (1997); Lennartz (1999); Porter (1999–2000); (b) regarding the *Samia*, by Jäkel (1982); West (1991); Omitowoju (2010); (c) regarding the *Sikyonioi*, by Belardinelli (1984), (1994; *passim*); and (d) regarding the *Perikeiromene*, Blanchard (2008). Among the most significant studies of this stripe dating before the 1980s I would count Lanowski (1965); Sandbach (1970); see also Méron (1972). The question of New Comedy's relation to Tragedy was also most fruitfully explored from a literary-historical viewpoint. Such studies as Arnott (1972), (1986); Nesselrath (1990), (1993); Csapo (2000), which emphasise the continuity of comic tradition, constitute a much-improved version of Prescott's view (Prescott 1917, 1918, 1919) that the evolution of New Comedy as a genre was a purely intra-generic process with no or little extrageneric influence.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Lanza (1993: 512): 'Si può dire che con Menandro si inventa un nuovo linguaggio comico, che sostituisce la pluralità dei registri espressive presenti e alternate nella commedia antica. Nel dialogo quotidiano si vanno innestando ed omogeneizzando termini di tradizione poetica, alta e bassa, di ascendenza retorica, talvolta di elaborazione filosofica. Ma ciò che conta è che mentre il tessuto verbale dell'antica appariva a forti contrasti cromatici e da tali contrasti otteneva sicuri effetti di comicità, in Menandro la disparità tendono a dissimularsi, il gioco della policromia linguistica diventa gioco di sfumature appena accennate, nel quale possono acquistate rilievo espressivo i tic verbali di alcuni personaggi.'

¹⁰⁵ See mainly Lanza (1993). Cf. also Gutzwiller (2000): 'The audience's metadramatic experience occurs when it focuses on the dissonance between the internal perception of a tragic plot and the external reality of a comic plot constructed by the combination and inversion of tragic scenarios.'

as a fundamental aspect of Menander's special kind of humour.¹⁰⁶ This *chiaroscuro* of 'high' and 'low' registers, of subjective pathos and objective levity, still exudes, according to some exponents of this theory, an aura of generic rivalry,¹⁰⁷ a multimodal parody of tragedy as moral exemplum and *magistra vitae*. Menander's characters, the theory goes, usually revert to tragic quotations (or exclamations in tragic style) when they are in the grip of misunderstanding: 'les modèles tragiques', writes Hurst (1990: 109), with reference to *Samia* 586ff., 'viennent aussi interférer avec la perception du réel, faussent complètement les données'. However, Hurst adds (1990: 100), the anguish, for instance, of Daos and the rest of Kleostratos' family at the beginning of the *Aspis*, is no less 'tragic' because the audience suspects (and soon learns) that the characters are in error, that their tragedy is false. The internal perspective is just as genuine and just as hermeneutically important.

The dust has now settled enough for us to realise that the gist lies here. Free from any compulsion to antagonise tragedy, but alert to the dramatic benefits of tonal mixing, Menander is keen on creating scenes of genuine pathos – but the juxtaposition of subjective and objective perspectives, the latter lightening the situation as a rule, prevents the play from slipping into melodrama.¹⁰⁸ In some cases (it should be underlined), the *scuro* can

¹⁰⁶ Halliwell (2008: 388–428, esp. 404–15). Halliwell glosses perspectivism as 'the combined permutations of "external" and "internal" viewpoints available to an audience, together with changes between first- and third-person points of view within the plays.'

¹⁰⁷ See Hurst (1990: 96, 98): 'La tragédie et la comédie se sont vues opposés sur le plan théorique [*sc.* by Antiphanes in the famous fr. 189 K.-A., but also by Menander] du point de vue de leur résultat, de leur relation avec le public, des difficultés de composition impliquées par chacun des deux genres ... Un poète comique directement impliqué dans le jeu qui se déroule entre comédie et tragédie, marque implicitement ou explicitement sa position.'

¹⁰⁸ Lanza (1993: 515). The juxtaposition of perspectives need not only be between that of the characters and that of the audience, but also between two characters reacting differently to the same external stimuli; cf. Halliwell (2008: 404): 'Thrasonides' behaviour at the start of *Misoumenos* (1–23), presented first through an impassioned soliloquy and then through Getas' cynically detached remarks about him, is a striking example of this further duality. For the soldier, the night is erotically charged and heavy with dark anxiety. For his slave, it is just filthy weather ("not even fit to let a dog outside", 15–16) and his master is a fool to be out in it. Can or should an audience adopt Getas' down-to-earth perspective and find Thrasonides' melodramatic feelings

be stronger than the *chiaro*. The sharp impression caused in *Epitrepontes* by Charisios' so-called 'crisis of consciousness' (*Epitr.* 908–42), after he realises how devoted Pamphile is and how strong-headed he had been, is not easily mitigated by the happy ending. As mentioned in the first section of this chapter, Menander did not shy away from the more sombre tones, although, of course, he never pushed them *usque ad coturnum*.¹⁰⁹

This is all very useful and enlightening, if only we are careful enough not to reduce the utility of tragic intertextuality to such emotional 'special effects', that is, not to vindicate from a different angle the idea that the tragic references are limited in scope and their effect is invariably fleeting and incidental.¹¹⁰ It is also essential not to circumscribe Menander's play with tragedy too tightly, to have it concerned solely with generic antagonism and/or metatheatrical humour (thus obfuscating Menander's dissimilarity to Aristophanes or indeed to Plautus in this latter respect).¹¹¹ Menander's interaction with tragedy has many hues and colours, some of which are known from earlier comedy: playing with register (creating effects of absurdity and bathos); laying bare the artificiality of theatrical conventions (metatheatre) either as a joke or within a (still humorous) project of generic competition and subversion are certainly some of them. There is a need for caution and precision here, if we are to describe comprehensively and pinpoint as exactly as the evidence allows Menander's own intertextual idiom. For, to be accurate, even tonal mixing of that implicit, integrated Menandrian sort is not an entirely novel idea.

laughable? Can it shift positions (or even adopt a confident detachment) and laugh at both characters? Or is it part and parcel of Menander's gelastic dialectic to create initial uncertainty in this regard?'

¹⁰⁹ Apuleius *Flor.* 16, p. 24, 4 H. with reference to Philemon (= Philemon test. 7 K.-A): *repperias tamen apud ipsum (sc. Philemonem) . . . ioca non infra soccum, seria non usque ad coturnum* ('you could discover in him jests not below the proper standards of comedy, and serious material, which does not reach the point of tragedy').

¹¹⁰ See, e.g., Gutzwiller (2000: 110): 'References to specific tragedies within the plays usually function to reveal a character's state of mind rather than any true tragic parallel for the plot as a whole.'

¹¹¹ On Aristophanic metatheatre, see chiefly Slater (2002). On Plautus, the classic reference is again Slater (1985).

We must never lose sight of the fact that Menander works within and builds on almost two centuries' worth of comic tradition. Michael Silk has shown eloquently to what extent Aristophanes had already experimented with this technique of tonal mixing, especially in plays like the *Clouds*. He even uses the term 'hybrid' to describe the stylistic result in those paratragic passages, where the normal 'double focus' (Silk 1993: 497) and the 'operative collision' (1993: 500) between the comic and the tragic elements is smoothed out in favour of 'a marked restraint in expression' and a distinct *color tragicus* completely absorbed into the fabric of the discourse, with 'no distracting attention drawn to it' (Silk 1993: 500). In such passages, writes Silk:

There is no defined or articulated evocation of a reality outside the comic reality: it is part and parcel of such an effect that the tragic colouration should be unspecifiable, and not point us to a specific tragic locus or a particular tragedy or tragedian. And the paratragedy does not impinge like a sudden change of key: there is no effect of suddenness at all, but rather one of concealed modulation into a new hybrid that establishes itself unannounced and without advertisement.

This kind of stylistic hybridity is indeed remarkably close to the Menandrian practice expounded above and akin to the way I employ the term myself to define the idiom of Menander – with the qualifying difference that Menandrian hybridity is a much more pervasive and universal, not by any means an exclusively stylistic, phenomenon. Crucially, this kind of hybridity, as Silk cautiously accepts (1993: 503, 504), is not at all the rule in Old Comedy, but apparently a short-lived experiment, perhaps even specific to Aristophanes:

Aristophanes [may be] demonstrably interested in the creation of hybrids, and, in particular, hybrids involving a compounding of the low with the tragic high; he is (as the *Clouds* paradigm shows) aware of the possibilities of a mediating, neutral hybrid; and yet (outside the *Clouds* paradigm) he seems wary of exploring the opportunities that such a hybrid might present . . . The point, then, is that to cultivate the restrained hybrid of *Clouds* would tend to subvert Aristophanic Old Comedy itself *tout court*. By the fourth century, it would seem, Aristophanes was indeed ready to move in that direction.

For Silk, Aristophanes toyed with generic hybridity on the level of style until late in his career, when comedic evolution was changing course on a large scale. Simon Goldhill and Charles

Platter, on the contrary,¹¹² working as they do with a Bakhtinian paradigm, cannot but recognise hybridity as the inalienable hallmark of all dialogic or ‘carnivalised’ genres. Interestingly, of course, despite their orthodox Bakhtinian, hence dissimilar use of the term, Goldhill and Platter do not understand Aristophanes all that differently from Silk: all three of these scholars correctly view that, as a rule, Aristophanic comedy is ‘a carnival of genres’, where the interplaying registers develop an overtly antagonistic relationship to one another, and in which the desired effect of generic/linguistic multiplicity, or ‘impurity’ or ‘unfinalisability’ (to use Bakhtin’s terms) – this ‘dynamic ambivalence’ of Aristophanes’ language (Platter 2007: 5) – rests not only on the colourful plethora of the registers involved, but also, or even more so, on their recognisability, that is, on the audience’s ability to single them out as autonomous and thus heterogeneous and incompatible entities. This is a kind of ‘hybridity’ very much unlike (my understanding of) Menander’s.

Goldhill speaks of Aristophanic parody as an interplay of voices, intentions and perspectives, all ‘vertiginously’ wrapped up in interlocking levels of fictionality: one of these levels is the assumption of tragic personae by comic characters and/or the representation of tragic situations and scenes. Platter, in an even more overtly Bakhtinian approach than Goldhill’s, understands Aristophanic comedy as a heteroglossia, in which the inversions and transpositions of various poetic registers produce a powerful effect of generic ‘carnivalisation’, where high interacts with low, and where epic and tragedy, as ‘monologic’ genres, that is, genres that assume a sense of superiority and distance, are critically recontextualised. Aristophanic comedy is ‘heavily dialogised’, says Platter, to the extent that the mixture of genres in its comic discourse is ‘almost sufficient to allow us to question whether [the comedies of Aristophanes] can be said to belong to a genre in any sense but the most conventional’ (Platter 2007: 28). Carnivalised genres, after all, practice the kind of discourse that ‘cannibalises other genres to create a type of literature that bills itself as capable

¹¹² Goldhill (1991: 167–222); Platter (2007), with all the earlier bibliography (to which add Tsitsiridis 2010, a useful new typology of Aristophanes’ parodic techniques).

of passing judgment on the genres it recycles' (Platter 2007: 23). In Aristophanic comedy, however, there is not one single, dominant, 'comic' style imposing itself upon others by way of ridicule, argues Platter. Instead, there is:

a sheer diversity of material . . . No single style, not even the authorial voice of the *parabasis*, is able to establish itself as an authority beyond impeachment. Instead, linguistic elements are progressively undermined by incongruous and incompatible sentiments expressed elsewhere. Nor are they reducible to a simple hierarchy within which real and fantastic, oligarchic and democratic, old-fashioned and newfangled elements can be sorted out to reveal the essential attitudes of Aristophanic comedy and to separate them from attitudes that are epiphenomenal, that is, presented for the sake of laughter but with no serious purpose. Such divisions are spurious, as is the implicit claim that there are elements of comedy *not* for the sake of laughter and with only a serious purpose. Instead, the juxtaposition of incompatible elements creates a climate of radical ambivalence, forcing audiences to choose from a broad range of interpretative possibilities. (Platter 2007: 30–1)

It is just as important, therefore, to realise that Menandrian practice did not appear out of the blue as it is to establish that Menander's engagement with tragedy, sharply dissimilar to the Aristophanic norm, goes much beyond parody, generic antagonism, stylistics or emotional special effects. As shown by the case of *Epitrepontes* and Euripides' *Alope*, tragic intertextuality in Menander can extend much beyond the scope of a transitory reference or the comic adjustment of a single tragic scene, to cases where a whole plot or a major character walks on the tracks of tragic paradigms (and is mercifully derailed off them in the nick of time). This is a crucial point. If in the myth burlesques of Middle Comedy mythological characters could be made to behave like ordinary Athenians,¹¹³ in Menander, vice versa, ordinary Athenians could be made to behave like mythological characters. More often than not they are made to be expressly conscious of their precedents, as in the case of the two fathers in Act IV of *Samia*. In other cases, the audience is privy to this duality at the expense of the characters themselves.

¹¹³ On the mythological burlesque in Middle Comedy, see Nesselrath (1990: 188–241). See also Cusset (2003: 31–52); Arnott (2010: 294–300).

Such a character with no explicit awareness of having tragic alter egos or a tragic alternative to the choices he makes is precisely the Smikrines of *Epitrepontes*. His is a very interesting case indeed. The *Epitrepontes* is Menander's play that blends more effectively than any other the urban and the mythical, the common bourgeois plot of ignorance and misunderstanding with the mythological motif of the exposed child.¹¹⁴ The resolution of the misunderstanding and the salvation of the οἶκος, the highest stake of them all, are contingent upon the fate of the child: thus, the mythical, in the double sense of an unlikely, 'magical' rescue and of a parallel from tragic myth, should be expected to be a catalyst in the story. And it is, pivoting on the figure of Smikrines, who in fact ambushes his tragic intertexts in a hilarious fashion: Smikrines acts as a benevolent spirit of comedy unawares, while in fact he is intending to perform the comedic version of the evil acts of Kerkylon (of Euripides' *Alope*) or Aleos (of Euripides' *Auge*), his tragic alter egos: to kill not the bride, but the marriage. Smikrines initiates the very first and the very last stage of Pamphile's and Charisios' rapprochement. First, in the arbitration scene, completely ignorant of the upshots, he delivers a verdict that renders the recognition of the child possible (this will happen eventually thanks to Habrotonon and Onesimos); and, finally, he instigates, again inadvertently, through his aforementioned overtures to Pamphile and the reply they provoke, Charisios' contrition (*Epitr.* 908–32), which renews the psychological bond of the couple before their physical reunion. Unlike the slave and the *hetaira*, Smikrines makes it as he is trying to break it! It is highly entertaining to see how Tyche sees to it that Smikrines is doing good despite both his comic ancestry (he is of the σμικρολόγος type, and probably wears a damning mask, too: λυκομήδειος the meddler)¹¹⁵ and his tragic mirrors, who in order to preserve

¹¹⁴ The story of 'the girl's tragedy' (a term of Walter Burkert), which often comprises the motif of the exposed child, is treated by Scafuro (1990). Scafuro focuses on the stories of Auge, Alope, Antiope, Melanippe, Danae and Creousa.

¹¹⁵ Pollux, 4.144, Comic Mask No. 7: 'the Lycomedian is curly-haired, long-bearded, raises one of his eyebrows, and shows a tendency to meddle in other people's business' (ὁ δὲ λυκομήδειος οὐλόκομος, μακρογένειος, ἀνατείνει τὴν ἑτέραν ὄφρυν, πολυπραγμοσύνην παρενδείκνυται). Furlley (2009: 17), is non-committal about Smikrines' mask, but he surmises the ἡγεμῶν πρεσβύτης (Pollux, Comic Mask No. 3), tentatively. Martina

themselves led their daughters and grandsons to their doom. While the mythological exposed child finds a foe in his grandfather, Ignorance and Tyche save Smikrines from himself and from his tragic selves.

Let us expound in more detail on Demeas of *Samia*, another character for whom intertextuality is paramount. The allusive game in this play is again subtle and discreet, *more hellenistico*. The two old men of the *Samia*, too, are well aware that their actions have mythic and tragic models. They try desperately to pinpoint those models, but entertainingly none of the many suggestions they come up with actually fits. On the contrary, it is archetypes of which they, especially Demeas, are unconscious that define their position.

Menander's talent for this kind of intertextual irony is shown at its best in *Sam.* 495–500. It is an apt choice that the character who forays most boldly into, and gets most miserably lost in, the forest of potential tragic parallels, Nikeratos, is on the face of it the most block-headed of the male bunch in the *Samia*. If laughter is indeed, as Freud wanted it, the ability to relish one's feeling of superiority over another, then intertextuality is a primary source of enjoyment for the knowledgeable spectator of the *Samia*. Nikeratos, of course, will be redeemed somehow: he will fail miserably in all his attempts to pinpoint tragic exempla for Demeas, but ironically, as we shall see, it is Demeas' own pitiful failure to recognise what tragic character fits him best that could have had (but thankfully does not have) the most threatening consequences:

- (Ni) οὐ γάρ; ὦ πάνδεινον ἔργον· ὦ τὰ Τηρέως λέχη 495
Οἰδίπου τε καὶ Θυέστου καὶ τὰ τῶν ἄλλων, ὅσα
 γεγονόθ' ἡμῖν ἔστ' ἀκοῦσαι, μικρὰ ποιήσας –
 (Mo) ἐγώ;

(2000) and Ireland (2010) refrain from making any suggestions. The Smikrines of *Sikyonioi*, who seems to be just as much of a nuisance as his better-known namesakes in *Aspis* and *Epitrepontes*, receives the following biting words from Theron (*Sik.* 160–1): 'Oh, I hate you and all the likes of you who raise their eyebrows' (μισῶ σε καὶ τοὺς τὰς ὀφρῦς ἐπη[ρκότας | ἅπαντας). Theron is being metaphorical, but his metaphor touches precisely on the physiognomic value of a raised eyebrow: a mixture of arrogance with nosiness.

The mirrors of stories

- (Ni) τοῦτ' ἐτόλμησας σὺ πρῶξαι, τοῦτ' ἔτλης; Ἀμύντορος
νῦν ἔχρῃν ὀργὴν λαβεῖν σε, Δημέα, καὶ τουτονὶ
ἐκτυφλῶσαι. 500
- (NIK) No? Oh, what a dreadful deed, this is! Oh you, who make the sexual jaunts of Tereus and Oedipus and Thyestes and the rest we have come to hear about appear small and insignificant!
- (MO) Me?
- (NIK) You dared do such a thing? Your heart could take it? You should have assumed the anger of Amyntor, Demeas, and have blinded this one outright!

Nikeratos first names three misguided models for the alleged incest of Moschion with Chrysis: Tereus, Oedipus and Thyestes. The funny thing is that all three of these exempla could apply somehow to somebody in the play, but the oblivious Nikeratos turns them entirely to the wrong direction, no doubt to the discerning audience's great amusement. Moschion is indeed a sexual malefactor like Thyestes, but adultery is not his crime. Moschion, again like Tereus, is indeed a rapist, but not of his father's concubine. And, finally, Oedipus has lots to do with this play, as the attentive spectator of lines 326–8 already suspects, but not for the reason that Nikeratos imagines and not regarding Moschion: Oedipus has everything to do with Demeas himself, as we shall see.

Having consigned Moschion to the purgatory of great sexual deviants of the mythic past, Nikeratos now forages for an archetype of paternal revenge. He casts his dear friend Demeas as the angry father, who has been wronged by his mistress and his son. The exemplum Nikeratos finds most pertinent for Demeas is Amyntor, father of Phoenix, who blinded his son for his supposed adultery with his concubine. This is a most didactic choice for the modern interpreter as for the kind of intertextual space Menander's performances open up. Menander opts to challenge his audience's theatrical memory with Euripides' *Phoenix*. Theseus of the *Hippolytos*, another prime relevant example, which modern scholars have privileged, is not included in Nikeratos' list: this goes to show that verbal (or other) markers of intertextuality in Menander can spark multifarious possible reception processes, which the playwright is not willing to restrict. Menander can

signal the latent bridging of his performance with other performances and then leave the audience to sift through the multiple potentialities in much the same way that Nikeratos does. Such openness is certainly part of the game in a theatrical environment that affords a plethora of conceivable connections.

The intertextual game proceeds. As expected, of all the battery of possibilities thrust his way, Demeas himself, opinionated as he is, likes none! Personally, he wishes to cast himself not in the mould of the betrayed father, but in that of the spurned lover, because thus he can shift the blame from Moschion to Chrysis. A guilty Moschion, after all, does not fit the illusion to which Demeas is so desperately trying to cling, namely, that he enjoys an exemplary relationship with his stepson.¹¹⁶ Demeas' own hunt for mythical analogues, 150 lines before, had been just as surprising. Demeas had rejected Nikeratos' Aerope (adulterous lover of Thyestes); still he did not go for the likes of Phaedra or Stheneboia, the two figures rendered most notorious in this context by the tragedy of Euripides, but astonishingly, he chose the one exemplum of adultery Euripides actually exonerates. Menander plays a clever game of intertextual subversion here, again based on the abortive attempts of his characters to navigate through the high seas of the theatrical and literary tradition that defines them. Demeas castigates Chrysis as 'his own Helen' (τὴν ἐμὴν Ἑλένην, *Sam.* 337–8); but, in order to prove that Moschion was actually entrapped, Demeas needed an active female agent taking the initiative in the affair (which Helen is not so much). Demeas' chosen archetype is supposed to be derailed, of course: Chrysis, like Euripides' Helen, is totally blameless!

There is, then, a whole nexus of paradigms for Demeas' behaviour, all wittily undermined as specious. There is also a constant shift from what the audience know to be an appropriate example, or from what they would normally expect even in that spirit of misappropriation, to what the characters themselves suggest and is completely off the mark. The *Samia* seems especially to be relishing this amplitude, to be capitalising wonderfully on the fact that it

¹¹⁶ Cf. Weissenberger (1991).

is part and parcel of a tradition of narratives bound to insinuate themselves into the dramatic process: it seems to be celebrating its own textuality. This is further corroborated, in my opinion, by the fact that the most sustained tragic paradigm for Demeas is the one flagged in the most oblique, *cherché* manner in the performance. This 'hidden' paradigm also happens to be the sole one not undercut as comically irrelevant. To reflect the semantic processes of the text, let us also piece it together bit by bit.

Demeas is a man who believes strongly (and, of course, wrongly!) in his ability to 'read' the people and the situations around him. This confidence in his cognitive faculties of perception and inductive reasoning applies especially to his supposedly 'exemplary' relationship with his adoptive son, whom he thinks he has all figured out. At the beginning of the play, Demeas returns from Athens after a painful journey to Pontos hoping to find peace and quiet. Instead, he is embroiled in this whole filthy drama of filial betrayal, perceived incest and a bastard child. Refusing to blame his son, although he comes face to face with what looks like incontrovertible evidence of misconduct on the youth's part (Chrysis is nursing his baby!), Demeas prefers, as mentioned, to lash out at Chrysis as well as, naturally, at the usual hapless punching bag of comedy, the slave. Chasing Parmenon to beat him up, Demeas bursts out shouting (*Sam.* 326ff.):

Λάβ' αὐτόν. — ὦ πόλισμα Κεκροπίας χθονός,
ὦ ταναὸς αἰθήρ, ὦ — τί, Δημέα, βοᾷς;
τί βοᾷς, ἀνόητε; κάτεχε σαυτόν, καρτέρει.
οὐδὲν γὰρ ἀδικεῖ Μοσχίων σε. παράβολος
ὁ λόγος ἴσως ἐστ', ἄνδρες, ἀλλ' ἀληθινός. 330
εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἦ βουλόμενος ἦ κεκνισμένος
ἔρωτι τοῦτ' ἔπραξεν ἢ μισῶν ἐμέ,
ἦν ἂν ἐπὶ τῆς αὐτῆς διανοίας ἔτι θρασὺς
ἐμοί τε παρατεταγμένος. νυνὶ δέ μοι
ἀπολελόγηται τὸν φανέντ' αὐτῷ γάμον 335
ἄσμενος ἀκούσας. οὐκ ἔρων γάρ, ὡς ἐγὼ
τότ' ὥόμην, ἔσπευδεν, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἐμὴν
Ἑλένην φυγεῖν βουλόμενος ἔνδοθέν ποτε·
αὕτη γάρ ἐστιν αἰτία τοῦ γεγονότος·
παρέλαβεν αὐτόν που μεθύοντα δηλαδὴ, 340
οὐκ ὄντ' ἐν ἑαυτοῦ· πολλὰ δ' ἐξεργάζεται
ἀνόητ' ἄκρατος καὶ νεότης, ὅταν λάβῃ

Menander's New Comedy between reality and textuality

τὸν συνεπιβουλεύσαντα τούτοις πλησίον.
οὐδενὶ τρόπῳ γὰρ πιθανὸν εἶναί μοι δοκεῖ
τὸν εἰς ἅπαντας κόσμιον καὶ σώφρονα 345
τοὺς ἄλλοτρίους εἰς ἐμὲ τοιοῦτον γεγονέναι,
οὐδ' εἰ δεκάκις ποητός ἐστι, μὴ γόνῳ
ἐμὸς υἱός· οὐ γὰρ τοῦτο, τὸν τρόπον δ' ὀρώ.
χαμαιτύπη δ' ἄνθρωπος, ὄλεθρος.

Grab that man! *Oh, town in the land of Cecrops, oh, clear sky, oh* – why are you screaming, Demeas? Why are you screaming, you silly man? Get a grip of yourself, be patient. Moschion has done you no wrong. This may be an absurd thing to say, men, but it's true. If he had done this action either in his own free will or infatuated by love or out of hatred for me, he would still be of the same brazen mind, still opposing me. But now he has cleared himself in my eyes, accepting gladly the plans of marriage I laid before him. His rush was not because of love, as I thought then, but because he wanted to get away from the house and from my own Helen. She is the one to blame for what has happened. She caught him when he was drunk, not in control of his own actions. Undiluted wine and youth mixed together can make a man do lots of stupid things, when they find somebody willing to be their accomplice. There is no way possible that somebody who is proper and self-controlled towards all strangers would behave that way towards me, not even if he was adopted ten times over rather than my natural son. It's not that, I can see his character. It's that bloody damn whore!

Funnily enough, in the clasp of emotional mayhem, Demeas is given the readiness of mind to quote from Euripides' *Oedipus* (*Sam.* 326–8). At first sight, the quotation seems incongruous, though: what does the clear sky of Athens have to do with anything in this situation? This seems to be one of those cases where the quotation fits precisely because in this moment of pathos Demeas needs the kind of rhetorical ὕψος that only tragic language can provide. It seems that in a 'realistic' scene Demeas is mixing up, unrealistically, the theatre, with little concern for relevance. Referencing tragedy, of course, is something that fits with Demeas' overall wittiness:¹¹⁷ albeit not on a par with modern notions of psychological verisimilitude, it is a dexterous stroke of

¹¹⁷ That Menander individualised his characters by way of linguistic characterisation was already remarked by Plutarch (test. 103 K.-A.). Important bibliography on the topic includes Sandbach (1970); Katsouris (1975b); Arnott (1995); Silk (1995). The latter is a general survey of the language of old men from Homer to Menander.

characterisation. On a different level, the scene underlines a common motif in most tragic references in this play: that tragedy is not just a style (*hyphos*), but also an *ēthos*, a special way to see (and to play!) matters – a silly way (τι βοῶς, ἀνόητε;).¹¹⁸ Demeas will later use tragic myth (the story of Zeus and Danae) in an ironic crack at Nikeratos. He feels back in control by that point, since he has already unravelled the situation; but his own mind had been equally shrouded by a dark cloud of misapprehension: the common tragic motif of darkness and blindness as a metaphor for man's inability to penetrate through the deceptive appearances is a benchmark both for Demeas and for *Samia* as a whole.

The tragic quotation in *Sam.* 326–8, therefore, has, in my view, more dramatic substance than a mere 'tonal' variation does: it constitutes one of those references that intertextual theory calls 'systemic' (references to 'verbal [*sc.* in the theatre, also visual] categories, literary and non-literary, larger than single texts');¹¹⁹ it ushers in not so much a single individual intertext, as a whole system of homocentric texts. Thus, the utility of the quotation does not rely so much on the identification of the specific source (which must have been very tricky for the masses, albeit still possible for the select few). It rests rather on the fact that it marks a series of major 'Oedipal' themes, central to this play: the themes of darkness and light, blindness and insight, and above all of excessive and illusory confidence.

The quotation also has perspective, intratextual depth, which scholars have missed: the reference to the *tanaos aithēr* of Athens is not novel in the play; it harks back to *Sam.* 97–112, where Demeas and Nikeratos are again glorifying the sun and the light of Athens as opposed to that of Pontos and Byzantium. The tragic quotation in *Sam.* 326–8 cross-references an earlier

¹¹⁸ See Hurst (1990: 100–3). I quote from p. 101: 'tout se passe comme si les sentiments tragiques suffisaient à rendre aveugle le plus raisonnable des homes. Pour retrouver son bon sens Déméas doit explicitement quitter la sphère de la tragédie.'

¹¹⁹ Edmunds (2001: 143).

passage that needs to be brought to bear on the one that concerns us here:

(ΔΗ)¹²⁰ [ἄ]ρ' οὖν μεταβολῆς αἰσθάνεσθ' ἤδη τόπου,

ὅσον διαφέρει ταῦτα τῶν ἐκεῖ κακῶν;

Πόντος· **παχεῖς γέροντες**, ἰχθυὺς ἀφθονοί,

ἀηδία τις πραγμάτων. Βυζάντιον· 100

ἀψίνθιον, πικρά πάντ'. Ἄπολλον. ταῦτα δὲ

καθαρὰ πενήτων ἀγάθ'. Ἀθῆναι φίλταται,

πῶς ἂν [γ]ένοιθ' ὑμῖν ὅσων ἔστ' ἄξιοι,

ἴν' ὤμεν ἡμεῖς πάντα μακαριώτατοι

οἱ τὴν πόλιν φιλοῦντες . . . 105

(ΝΙ) ἐκ[εῖ]ν' ἐθαύμαζον μάλιστα, Δημέα,

τῶν περὶ ἐκείνον τὸν τόπον· **τὸν ἥλιον**

οὐκ ἦν ἰδεῖν ἐνίοτε παμπόλλου χρόνου·

ἄρ' παχύς τις, ὥς ἔοικ', ἐπεσκότει. 110

(ΔΗ) οὐκ, ἀλλὰ σεμνὸν οὐδὲν ἐθεῶτ' αὐτόθι,

ὥστ' αὐτὰ τἀναγκαῖ' ἐπέλαμπε τοῖς ἐκεῖ.

(DE) Can you sense the change of place already, how much the conditions here differ from the misery over there? Ah, Pontos: rich old men, plenty of fish, odious business. Byzantium. Wormwood. Everything bitter. But by Apollo, things here are the pure joy of poor folk. O, Athens dearest. How could you achieve what you deserve, so that we, the lovers of the city, are the most blessed in every respect!

(ΝΙΚ) This is what surprised me the most, Demeas, about that place: sometimes you wouldn't see the sun for great stretches of time. A thick fog, I guess, was obscuring it.

(DE) You couldn't, but there was nothing decent there to see, so those people had just the amount of light they would need.

This passage has been downplayed by most scholars either as a conventional *laus Athenarum* and/or as mere rhetorical claptrap to cover the time needed for the actors to move from the *eisodos*

¹²⁰ Scholars disagree on the distribution of speakers here. Papyrus B, and hence most modern editions, assign lines 97–105 exclusively to Demeas. Arnott (1998: 42) provides strong support for this assignment; see also Dedoussi (2006: 129). The idea of distributing the lines to two speakers, Demeas and Nikeratos, was Sandbach's, who adopted it in his OCT based on the observation that the disconnected, nervous style of *Sam.* 99–101, but also the reference to Athens as the Eldorado of the poor (ταῦτα δὲ/καθαρὰ πενήτων ἀγάθ') fitted Nikeratos' character better than Demeas'. Recently, Fountoulakis (2008) called for a return to Sandbach's proposal. Instead of style, his arguments are based on content (that the passage is full of commonplaces, which are more likely to be uttered by the simple Nikeratos rather than Demeas).

to the stage.¹²¹ Thus, the thematic connection with Act III was naturally completely missed. However, *Sam.* 97–112 is a rich repository of themes and motifs for the whole play. If we disregard this passage, we neglect a whole parameter very important for understanding Demeas.

Pontos is a land of material affluence and of *παχεῖς γέροντες*, Demeas contends (*παχύς* stands for both ‘rich’ and ‘stupid’), whereas Athens may be poorer but, as it is implied, the old men there are quick-witted and enlightened – like him! And yet, if we give credence to Arnott’s supplement in line 13, it is with the phrase *παχεῖς*] *ἔσμεν*, or something most probably to that effect, that Moschion probably introduced at the beginning of the play his vivid description of the wealth and prosperity his adoptive father had showered him with (*Sam.* 7–18):

ὥς μὲ]ν ἐτρύφησα τῷ τότ’ εὐθέως χρόνῳ
ὦν παι]δίον, μεμνημένος σαφῶς ἑῷ·
εὐεργέ]τει γάρ ταυτά μ’ οὐ φρονούντ’ αἰώ.
[εἴτ’ ἐν]εγράφη οὐδὲν διαφέρων οὐδενός, ἰο
τὸ λεγόμενον δὴ τοῦτο ‘τῶν πολλῶν τις ὢν’,
[ὅς γέγον]α μέντοι, νῆ Δί’, ἀθλιώτερος·
[παχεῖς] γάρ ἔσμεν. τῷ χορηγεῖν διέφερον
καὶ τῇ] φιλοτιμία· κύνας παρέτρεφέ μοι,
ἵππο]υς· ἐφυλάρχησα λαμπρῶς· τῶν φίλων 15
τοῖς δεομένοις τὰ μέτρι’ ἑπαρκεῖν ἐδυνάμην.
δι’ ἐκείνον ἦν ἀνθρώπου. ἀστείαν δ’ ὅμως
τοῦτων χάριν τιν’ ἀπεδίδουν· ἦν κόσμος.

I remember all too well, but I leave that aside for now, the life of luxury I enjoyed when I was a child. For he did me great good, but I could not see it just yet. After

¹²¹ A notable exception is Cusset (2000), who gives this passage an interesting metatheatrical significance; cf. pp. 210, 211: ‘Ce deux espaces [Athens and Pontos] s’opposent et c’est le passage de l’un dans l’autre, le retour de l’extérieur à l’espace visible de la cité théâtralisée qui permet la construction et l’avancée de l’intrigue. Le ‘changement du lieu’ n’est pas un simple déplacement spatial: c’est une véritable métaphore du lancement de l’intrigue après l’exposition, une métamorphose aussi du statut des personnages . . . L’espace dramatique où évoluent les personnages offre une situation exactement contraire à celle du hors-scène où justement toute action dramatique est impossible. L’obscurité est donc reléguée à l’extérieur dont elle est somme toute l’équivalent, tandis que l’espace dramatique est l’espace de la lumière où les personnages viennent remplir leur rôle.’ Fountoulakis (2009) explores the passage from a different perspective, as evidence of ‘the political sensibility of Menandrian comedy in a changing world extending beyond the boundaries of the Athenian polis’.

that, though, I enrolled into a deme, no different than anyone else, 'one of many', as the common saying goes, although by Zeus, I have become more wretched than many. [We are rich], you see. I excelled as a *khoregos* and in the pursuit of public honour. He helped me keep hunting dogs, horses. I was brilliant as a *phylarchos*. I was able to give my friends the help they needed. Because of him, I was a proper human being. But I repaid him in a fine way: I was proper in my manners.

If Arnott's supplement is correct,¹²² the echo between the two passages constitutes a delicate irony on Demeas' perceptive faculties and his blind faith in them. Oddly, Arnott himself supplements line 13 the way he does without connecting the two passages together, but such repetition would work very well theatrically speaking.¹²³ The notion of a *pachys* old man, rich and stupid, consorts well with the motifs of light and darkness, of fog and clarity, which prevail in *Sam.* 97ff. Demeas, in particular, is convinced that he alone lives in the *tanaos aithēr* and in the light, whereas everybody else is in the dark. And yet, until Act v the Pontic fog is shrouding not anybody else's eyes, but his own. Demeas falls from error to error and from misunderstanding to misunderstanding. Each new revelation causes the idealistic image he constructed about himself and his son to come crashing down. Pontos as an unhealthy place will return later in the play, in *Sam.* 416–17, where Demeas' behaviour will be seen as a form of mental disorder (Δημέας χολᾶ), precisely due to Pontic fog. Funnilly, Nikeratos is being literal here, perhaps evoking medical theories about the relation between the environment and (mental) health, such as those encapsulated by the Hippocratic treatise *On Airs, Waters, Places*. The audience, though, can catch the metaphor.¹²⁴

In *Sam.* 329ff., the self-possessed old man engages in his favourite hobby: inductive reasoning producing conclusions of

¹²² Arnott (1998: 38).

¹²³ It is reductive, I think, to argue with Arnott (1998: 44) that *pacheis gerontes* can only have a literal sense in *Sam.* 98.

¹²⁴ See also Dedoussi (2006: *ad locum*). Nikeratos, too, believes he is as bright as Demeas, but in fact he is being an idiot (*Sam.* 427). It is suggestive that the *aēdia pragmatōn* describing Pontos, its fog and its *pacheis gerontes*, is soon transferred to Athens and the equally *pachys* Demeas (ἀηδία τις συμβέβηκεν ἔκτοπος, *Sam.* 434), when Nikeratos realises that his neighbour's actions are fogged and blind.

unqualified conviction. Notice how his speech is structured along the axis of two main conditional sentences: *Sam.* 331ff. and *Sam.* 344ff. Notice also the strong phrase οὐδενὶ τρόπῳ γὰρ πιθανὸν εἶναι μοι δοκεῖ ('no way does this seem possible to me'). In *Sam.* 550, in a typical instance of comic projection, Demeas will burden Nikeratos with his own most characteristic vice: being *authekastos* (which here, despite the doubts of Gomme and Sandbach,¹²⁵ must mean 'headstrong', 'self-willed', one who thinks that he is the only reasonable man around and is in need of no one).¹²⁶ Moschion cannot have acted either out of hatred towards his father or out of love for Chrysis, because he was happy to accept the marriage Demeas arranged with Nikeratos' daughter. He who is so proper to all strangers cannot have been so cruel to his own parent, not even if he had been adopted ten times over. Hence, that whore Chrysis must be responsible for everything; she must have seduced him while he was drunk. This syllogism is a crystal clear *rhēsis ēthikē*. Demeas is indeed a logical being, but his logic is precarious: first, it is based on a partial command of the facts; secondly, it is excessively smug and impervious to doubt; thirdly, it is prejudiced and, hence, prone to conclusions supporting preconceived notions. In essence, Demeas concludes that Moschion cannot have deceived him, because the lad is κόσμιος ('well-behaved, orderly, decent')¹²⁷ and because their relationship is exemplary and cannot have any blemish.

So, in the *Samia* the chief character is a single-minded, dogmatic man, who entertains illusions of absolute cognitive self-sufficiency. This man plays first fiddle in a story that belongs to the type 'blissful ignorance turns violently into crashing understanding', and which is riddled with motifs revolving around light and darkness, knowledge and delusion, complacency and ἀμαρτία.

¹²⁵ Gomme-Sandbach (1973: 605–6 *ad loc.*).

¹²⁶ Cf. LSJ s.v. with Phil. *On Vices* (Περὶ κακιῶν), 10, cols. xvii, xix. In *Perik.* 397, Daos dismisses Sosias, who would not accept that Glykera was not in Moschion's house, with the quip: 'I am going inside, and I'll stay inside, as long as you behave like an *authekastos*' (Jensen's supplement, which gives the expected sense 'a hard-headed idiot').

¹²⁷ On the term κόσμιος in *Samia* and beyond, see Mette (1969). Contrast Blanchard (2002), who believes that *kosmiotēs* is not necessarily a virtue, but a form of *hyperbolē* compared with the *mesotēs* of *sophrosynē*.

The most famous realisation of this narrative structure on the Greek stage was none other than the story of Oedipus himself. It should be clear that by way of that well-known Menandrian ὑπὸ νόμια the Euripides quotation in *Sam.* 326–8, far from being a mere rhetorical effect, submits Oedipus as a wider exemplum both for Demeas and for the story. It is not clear why Menander chose to quote the *Oedipus* of Euripides instead of the arguably more famous Sophoclean play. It may be that the Euripidean play had recently been restaged as ‘old tragedy’ (*palaia tragōidia*). Or the choice might have been suggested merely by the motif of ταναὸς αἰθήρ found in the Euripides. Anyhow, this quotation – obscure for us, maybe not so obscure for the original audience – activates the complete systemic reference, that is, it goes beyond the particular Euripidean play. The *Samia* plays systemically with the Oedipus paradigm utilising elements not only from Euripides (any such are unfortunately unknowable to us), but also from the Sophoclean treatment of the myth.

Like the generic tragic hero, and indeed like Sophocles’ Oedipus, who falls *di’ hamartian tina* (Arist. *Poet.* 1453a9–10), Demeas is forced to confess in the end *hamartian kai manian* (*Sam.* 703), due to ignorance. If Sophocles’ Oedipus believed he could evade (or even outsmart) the oracle, Demeas falls prey to his assurance that he enjoys privileged and elite access to the whole truth. His smugness completely cripples his ability to communicate, to enter into a real dialogical exchange with anyone in the play. It has been noted that the *Samia* is Menander’s play with the widest usage of aposiopesis.¹²⁸ More importantly, it is the play with the largest percentage of monologues.¹²⁹ In this case, a rhetorical trope and a typical feature of dramatic structure, especially the latter, are given paramount thematic significance, as they highlight the ethological factors that thwart clear and honest communication between Demeas and his son: a debilitating sense of *aidōs* on the part of Moschion, a fantasy of cognitive self-sufficiency on the part of his father. The exemplarity of

¹²⁸ Casanova (2007).

¹²⁹ See J. Blundell (1980: 35–45).

their relationship results in a phobic lack of frankness and openness between them.¹³⁰

Demeas constructs an ideal image of himself (*Sam.* 210–11), his city (*Sam.* 97–112) and his son (*Sam.* 343–8). When this image starts to crumble and summer becomes winter (*Sam.* 207), Demeas, like Oedipus, vents his frustration on the innocent. Here begins a series of interesting structural parallelisms with Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Oedipus' wrath breaks out against Teiresias and Creon, whereas Demeas' is against Chrysis and Parmenon: in both cases, that is, against the least deserving targets. Both Sophocles' Oedipus and Demeas come close to the truth three times, but their arrogance does not allow them to see it and it stifles their interlocutors, who could have divulged the crucial information. Oedipus refuses to listen to Teiresias, the famous seer (*OT* 316–462); he denigrates Creon, a loving relative (*OT* 513–630); and only later, when Jocasta reveals the oracle given to Laius (*OT* 707–25), does he allow a shred of self-doubt to penetrate his mind. Demeas, correspondingly, misses the opportunity to learn the truth in *Sam.* 151–4, because he cannot question Moschion's eagerness to marry: this is what one should expect from a *kosmios*. Not even for a moment can Demeas suspect that anything will not go 'according to what he has in mind' (*kata noun*, *Sam.* 212) for him. Later, in *Sam.* 316–22, Demeas interrupts Parmenon with a snap 'what could I possibly be missing?' After all, 'he knows everything and he is fully and accurately informed'. He will squander yet another, third, opportunity to learn the truth, with an equally abrupt 'don't talk to me' (μή μοι λάλει, *Sam.* 380), cancelling Chrysis' possible intention to reveal what really happened. With a similar emblematic phrase, 'don't try to get into dialogue with to me' (μή μοι διαλέγῃς), he will push away first Moschion (*Sam.* 466) and then the cook (*Sam.* 384, 388–9). It is worth recalling here Oedipus' charge to Creon at the latter's dismissal: 'don't tell me' (μή μοι φράζει, *OT* 548).

¹³⁰ The exemplarity of Demeas' and Moschion's relationship is finely studied by Weisenberger (1991).

Demeas' discourse in the *Samia*, like Oedipus' in the *OT*, is brimming with words meaning 'to see', 'to know' and 'to understand': κατανοῶ (*Sam.* 154), σύννοιδά (*Sam.* 272), καταμάθω (*Sam.* 275), εἰδότα ἀκριβῶς πάντα καὶ πεπυσμένον (*Sam.* 316), most of which punctuate those very moments in the play in which this illusion of Demeas' breaks down. The bait Moschion uses in Act v to cause his father to throw in the towel already – he pretends that he will leave and go to Bactria as a mercenary soldier – is couched precisely as a challenge to Demeas' pansophy and omniscience (*Sam.* 521–2: 'not even if nothing of what you expected has happened?', οὐδ' εἰ μηδὲν ὦν σὺ προσδοκᾷς | γέγονεν;). Demeas' reaction to this is shocked disbelief: 'what do you mean nothing?' (πῶς μηδὲ ἔν; *Sam.* 522). A few lines earlier Demeas had again muted Moschion with an absolute: 'I know everything' (πάντ' οἶδα). In a moment when the Oedipal archetype in the *Samia* becomes completely diaphanous, Demeas invokes none other than Loxias himself to be a witness to his illusory powers of perception: 'isn't this clear, isn't it obvious? I call upon you as a witness, Loxias!' (ταῦτ' οὐ γνώριμα, οὐ σαφεῖ; μαρτύρομαι σε, Λοξία! *Sam.* 473–4).

Sam. 213 contains a line that encapsulates the essence of Demeas' behaviour in the play: 'by Athena, I don't even know if I can see properly right now' (οὐδ' εἰ βλέπω, μὰ τὴν Ἀθηνᾶν, οἶδ[α νῦν). I doubt that the essential similarity of this Menandrian phrase with *OT* 371 is accidental: 'you are blind in the ears, in the mind, as well as in the eyes' (τυφλὸς τὰ τ' ὦτα τὸν τε νοῦν τὰ τ' ὄμματ' εἶ). Oedipus, another self-possessed man, is thrusting this phrase against the blind seer Teiresias. Oedipus, too, is afflicted by the mistaken belief that everybody else's vision is veiled by ignorant blindness and that he alone can 'see'. This error destroys Oedipus utterly. Demeas, too, who here allows himself a fleeting moment of doubt, which he disperses summarily soon after, comes very close to losing everything and everyone (his concubine, his son, his grandson), but as the spawn of Comedy he manages to get away.

In her discussion of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Froma Zeitlin finds that Agamemnon is so easily cuckolded because his deceptive image of himself renders him unable to contemplate a

contradictory view.¹³¹ This is exactly Demeas' situation, too, until the very end of the *Samia*: this attitude is both tragicomic (that is, it has precedents in tragedy) and potentially 'tragic' – only comedy can diffuse its negative effects. But the *Samia* is certainly a play with a bittersweet aftertaste: Demeas' Oedipus-like *authadeia* has no injurious result for his son and grandson in the end, but it certainly traumatises perhaps the most noble of all of Menander's characters, the Golden One herself (Χρυσίς).

Tragedy, then, can be anywhere and everywhere in Menander, even behind the most mundane, that is, seemingly 'realistic' situations. In some cases, as was mostly the case in earlier comic tradition, tragedy remains extraneous, a foreign body meant to highlight the absurdity of the situation or to be deflated itself as absurd. But as a rule, the tragic intertext, which can be either a textual or, indeed, a visual reference to a tragic performance, is central to the Menandrian scene and its theatrical meaning. The tragic intertext can be signposted explicitly with verbatim quotation or in more indirect ways, such as structural correspondence between the scenes or even intervisual references. The tragic intertexts are not merely, or at least not always, 'a temporary comic mode'. There are instances in which tragic intertextuality has major thematic significance. It is perhaps no accident that, to the best of our knowledge, this occurs primarily in the more mature plays of Menander, such as the *Epitrepontes*, characterised by the extant hypothesis as *tōn aristōn* ('among Menander's best'), or the *Samia*, also considered by most to be a work of Menander's ripe age.

Far from being 'realistic' in the sense that they result immediately from the 'influence of real life', New Comedy plots, for all that they present believable situations of life in the polis, can emanate just as easily (and oftentimes simultaneously) from a primarily theatrical instigation. Tragic paradigms – not vaguely 'myths', but theatrical plots, complete with memories of (re)performance – are integral to the genre. To put it briefly: tragedy

¹³¹ Zeitlin (1965: 495).

seems to operate within New Comedy in ways comparable to the workings of epic myth in tragedy itself: that is, as a precedent series of performed narratives possessing 'sufficient gravity to hold the contemporary world within their orbit, creating a wide spatial field in which mythic and contemporary worlds could coexist' (thus Rush Rehm on myth in tragedy).¹³² New Comedy is inherently intertextual, as much as tragedy, and practically for the same reason and in much the same manner (and quite differently than older comedy): because the particular shape and emphases of both a tragic and a New Comedy plot is the product of variation (in New Comedy's case, also, to a certain extent, of urbanisation and secularisation) of known legendary material.

However, we need to reckon with a reasonable objection to this. William D. Furley has phrased it best in his commentary on the *Epitrepontes*:

References to myth were common in such real-life situations in Athens as court-cases; many forensic speeches contain mythological references to underpin an argument. For example Demosthenes (21.149) casts aspersions on Meidias' legitimacy by saying that a secret surrounds his birth ὥσπερ ἐν τραγῳδίᾳ ... And we can be sure that everyday life and conversation frequently involved comparisons with mythical personages and events, as these were paradigms for the Greeks. Hence, when Syriskos here compares the child's predicament in the dispute with mythical exposed babies, he is doing what an average Athenian commonly did. This *reinforces* the implied reality of the stage dispute: the characters on stage talk 'just like' Athenians involved in a real dispute.¹³³

Be that as it may, unlike 'real' Athenians, they never stop being characters on stage, sharing both the physical and the discursive space of the Theatre of Dionysus with their tragic counterparts. Widespread knowledge and use of tragedy in contemporary Athens cannot be used as evidence against intertextuality in the theatre of Menander: it would be like saying that because real people, too, can cite poetry at dinner parties, a poet's referencing foreign verse in his own poetry is inconsequential. Referring to myth and specifically to tragedy is something real Athenians

¹³² Rehm (2002: 30).

¹³³ Furley (2009: 155). Furley builds on a point by Omitowoju (2002: 161–2).

certainly did, but in a theatre like Menander's the phenomenon is of a different order.

Still, though, the interplay between the semblance of forensic 'realism' in Syriskos' behaviour and the intertextuality of his theatrical station is indeed a major source of humour in the *Epitrepontes* scene. Interestingly, Syriskos' foray into theatrical analogies reminds one of the *Samia* lines we discussed above (*Sam.* 495–500). Syriskos points to Neleus and Pelias, exposed sons of Tyro by Poseidon, as parallels for the boy and his contested trinkets. Nevertheless, the closest tragic intertext for the arbitration scene and the *Epitrepontes* as a whole is, as Hyginus 187 shows, neither of the two *Tyro* plays by Sophocles (or some other play featuring these particular twins), but Euripides' *Alope*. Syriskos is clever enough to use myth to his personal advantage (as one would in a court of law), but the audience, too – 'competent spectators' (*theatai epieikeis*), we can assume (*Arist. Poet.* 1462a) – are alerted to the fact that actually, like Nikeratos, he fluffs his references. Humorously, Syriskos is a character who is cognizant of a theatrical world out there that may be useful to him as a source of authority, but is not aware that he is actually the character of a play which mirrors that theatrical world closely, that his very arguments are in fact reflecting those made by a theatrical character in the respective situation. However, whereas in Euripides' *Alope* the shepherds' squabble (most likely self-interested, too)¹³⁴ over the *regia vestis* awakened Kerkyon to the existence of his threatening grandson and led the boy to his death, Syriskos' guileful greed, especially the cogent mythological connection he makes between the trinkets and the future fate of the child, will cause Smikrines to make the fortunate decision unbeknown to his own self. The blend of verisimilitude and (inter)textuality in Menander's oeuvre is exquisite.

New Comedy was the product of an evolutionary oxymoron: on the one hand, comedy as a genre displayed a fair amount of

¹³⁴ The child was of royal station and he who returned him to that station could definitely expect lush rewards. Examples of common folk expecting rewards for their services to kings are not unknown in tragedy: remember, for instance, the Messenger breaking the news of Heracles' return to Deianeira in Sophocles' *Trachiniae* 180ff.

continuity from Aristophanes to Menander;¹³⁵ on the other hand, the formative pressure of tragedy is obvious and its penetration into Menander's genre is very deep. Parody may well have been the prime channel, whereby tragic structures and signifiers were initially transfused into comedy, especially during the fourth century;¹³⁶ but, reaching Menander, tragic elements are so deeply woven into the fabric of the genre that they can no longer be seen as extraneous intruders or casual occurrences. For all intents and purposes, New Comedy is a hybrid genre.¹³⁷ Tragedy is a genetic component of New Comedy, a fact that provides copious possibilities for reworking, of innovation and ironic double play with a view to stratifying the plot and universalising its meaning. New Comedy does not confine itself to debunking tragedy. In terms of mega-structure, the genre largely urbanises and secularises narratives shaped by tragic *μῦθος*, overlaying an urban 'superstratum' onto a mythical 'substratum', often with the crust being rather thin. Just like tragedy and myth, New Comedy and tragedy lie in constant interchange, on the levels of text, performance and reception of performance. We need to reckon with the evolution of Menander's comedy to appreciate some of its most salient qualities; the genre's evolutionary trail is not simply of historical significance to the New Comedy scholar. Tragic intertextuality is a way for Menander's genre to perform its own hybridity on the stage. Herein, in this almost counter-intuitively thick theatrical texture, lies, I think, much of the appeal of the genre.

¹³⁵ On comic continuities in the fourth century, see Arnott (1972), (1986); Csapo (2000).

¹³⁶ See Nesselrath (1993), (1995).

¹³⁷ The theory of 'royal genres' and generic hybridisation was propounded by the Polish formalist Ireneusz Opacki, cf. Duff (2000: 118–26). By hybridisation, Duff notes, 'Opacki means not just the particular type of genre mixing for which Alastair Fowler reserves the term (Fowler 1982), but the many different kinds of crossfertilisation, which occur when in the course of their historical development other genres enter into the sphere of influence of . . . a "royal genre".' This 'royal genre' exerts transformative influence on the lesser genres, hybridising them not by transplanting its subcodes directly, but by creating a dominant literary trend, in which the 'royal genre' is 'the sum of its poetics'. Generic development is engendered through a natural development of re-evaluation and redistribution of those elements within the literary trend characteristic of the 'royal genre'. What happens in due course is just the 'canonisation of the junior branch'. This process seems particularly apt to describe the parallel development of tragedy and comedy in the period of the Middle.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to describe a type of comic theatre, which to the ancients at least looked like a photographic document of its day and times, but still produces an image of society that constitutes an elaborate ideological construct; a genre that, while not losing touch with its social and historical environment, still very much springs from (inter)textuality. Menander creates a theatrical universe, where the plot is stratified in three interlocking layers: (a) a ‘realistic’ ‘urban’ boy-meets-girl scenario, simple, stereotypical, circumscribed and rather narrow;¹³⁸ (b) a much wider ideological level, in which this mundane scenario resonates with the stakes of the civic value system, and where social reality expands into a magical new existence of inclusion and harmony, marking this process all along with distinct self-consciousness, even a pinch of subversive irony; and, finally, (c) a third, even broader archetypal level, which projects the urban story to the level of tragic myth. Menander’s boys and girls are not, to employ the terminology of C. S. Peirce, merely ‘iconic’ representations of ‘real’ counterparts, but also ‘indexes’ to the vagaries of civic ideology, as well as to mythical and, indeed, theatrical archetypes lurking in the background and informing their actions, humorously or in more serious tones. Even behind the most mundane comic situations in Menander one can find ideological depth. One can also recognise tragic intertexts (often complete memories of past performances, not just mythical narratives), which create perspective, but also a sense of self-reflexive derivativeness and referentiality that ironically undercuts and unhinges the ‘realism’ of it all. Aristophanes of Byzantium perhaps would be closer to the mark if he had written: ὦ Μένανδρε καὶ βίε | πρότερος ἄρ’ ὑμῶν πρότερον οὐκ ἐψεύσατο.

¹³⁸ Cf. Lowe (2000): ‘New Comedy is, quite simply, the most rule-bound and programmed of all classical narrative genres. Its stories inhabit one of the narrowest universes ever created in fiction, pursuing the economy principle to a ruthless extreme that is hard to parallel anywhere in any later literature of comparable stature and ambition . . . What New Comedy does is to propose a universe that is overwhelmingly systemic: a world in which individual relationships are apprehended as part of a collective process governed by precise and inviolate rules of play.’

NEW PERFORMANCE: VISUALITY AND INTERVISUALITY IN MENANDER

Chapter 1 demonstrated that Menander's comedy is a complex, elaborate piece of theatrical art, which accumulates multiple layers of meaning and ideological significance upon a relatively thin-crusted urban scenario of romantic love. Primary, and irreducible, I argued, is the significance of intertextuality, especially intertextuality with tragedy, for understanding and appreciating Menander's kind of drama. This chapter will make the point that the visual dimension of Menander's performance can be just as referential, just as laden with the potential to activate associations with various systems of reference. This referentiality of the visual, or 'intervisuality', which further thickens the texture of New Comedy, is submitted as one of the defining characteristics of the genre.

Opening credits

Let us begin by looking at a second-century AD wall painting from Ephesus and a very similar, recently discovered mosaic from Antioch (reproduced here as Figures 2.1 and 2.2), which almost certainly preserve a famous but now lost (i.e., not surviving in the extant text) moment of Menandrian performance: the opening of *Perikeiromene*.¹ The play tells the story of a soldier, Polemon, prone to fits of anger and violence, and his *pallakē*, Glykera, a free-born girl, who because of her father's destitution was reduced to concubinage. A family who live next door to the house where

¹ Cf. Arnott (1998). For a discussion of the Ephesus painting, see Stročka (1977: 48, 55ff). On the Antioch mosaic, which is dated in the first half of the third century AD., but obviously harks back to the same Hellenistic ancestor as the Ephesus painting, see Gutzwiller and Çelik (2012): the *Perikeiromene* panel is depicted in figure 10-3 and discussed at pp. 581–90.

Opening credits



Figure 2.1 Wall painting from Ephesos (north wall of SR 6, Hanghaus 2) depicting Menander's *Perikeiromene*



Figure 2.2 Mosaic from Antioch depicting a scene from Menander's *Perikeiromene*

she resides with her soldier lover adopted her brother Moschion. Glykera knows of their situation, but Moschion does not; and on top of that he is nursing romantic feelings for the girl. The plot's main twist, Polemon's assault on Glykera and the brutal cutting of her hair, was motivated by a misunderstanding: Polemon saw Glykera hugging Moschion and immediately jumped to the wrong conclusions. As a result of the assault, Glykera abandons Polemon and takes refuge with Moschion's mother. The glimpses we have of the opening scene of the play show that it must have been particularly stark, not least because charged silence and intervisual reference enhanced the force of human passion. With all due reservation as regards the details (no artistic representation can be trusted implicitly), there is much to be learned as regards the density of the visual in Menander's performance, its ability to invest the romantic crust of the action with cultural resonance and depth.

The fateful hair cutting is more likely to have happened prior to the beginning of the action than further along its course.² Hence, the opening scene of the play seems to have presented the results of Polemon's outrage in a powerful tableau vivant.³ In the wall paintings, Glykera seems to be standing speechless, her long cloak 'raised at the back so that it conceals her hair'. She is turning her back on a young man, most probably the soldier Polemon, who 'seems to be gazing gloomily into distance', probably already regretful of both his act and of Glykera's refusal to accept his apologetic gifts. A third figure, possibly Sosias, has his 'right arm raised in an emotional gesture', perhaps as he is delivering background information on what had happened.⁴ Sosias' activity contrasts starkly with Polemon's disconsolation and even more plainly with Glykera's indignant silence.

The tableau, Ferrari notes, is designed 'to mystify the audience and get them involved', an effect produced chiefly by the strange, surprising condition of Glykera's mask, which must manifest the results of the soldier's actions.⁵ This is a perceptive remark, alert

² Gutzwiller and Çelik (2012: 588–90) disagree. According to them, the violent cutting of Glykera's hair happened soon after the scene depicted in the Antioch and Ephesos pieces. Polemon, they assume, appears carrying expensive gifts for Glykera (the objects shown by his feet as he sits on the bench). Glykera is already on stage: she came out exasperated after the encounter with Moschion. Polemon is ready to present his gifts, when Sosias appears and startles him with his disastrous misapprehensions concerning the encounter of Glykera and her brother. Glykera at first listens in distress, and then she runs inside chased by an enraged Polemon. The violent hair-cutting happens offstage at that moment. Although there is nothing inherently unbelievable in this alternative hypothesis (all possibilities must remain open), some of the arguments supporting it raise doubts. That Glykera may have delivered a prologue speech prior to the encounter with Polemon is probable, but the parallels with Lysistrata and Thrasonides adduced by Gutzwiller and Çelik as conclusive proof to that effect do not seem relevant (they are dissimilar characters in different situations). Equally questionable appears to be the argument that in the Antioch scene some hair shows beneath Glykera's hood, so she has not yet been shorn. It fits Polemon's character much better to imagine that his act was a momentary fit of madness (hence the damage he caused was partial), rather than a conscious and deliberate attempt to humiliate his beloved by shearing her hair off completely. The arguments against taking the present participle of the title as evidence that the crucial action happens in the present tense of the action have already been laid down by Gomme and Sandbach (1973: 468).

³ Initial tableaux presenting powerful, emotionally charged scenes prior to the beginning of the action proper were a common feature of tragic and comic drama already since the fifth century: see Burian (1977). See also Arnott (2001) for a general survey of this technique, among other instances of 'visible silence' in Menander.

⁴ All quotations are from Arnott (1996b: 369). ⁵ Ferrari (1996: 235).

to the importance of the mask in Menander's plays, but there is much more to the scene than mystifying power. On a deeper level, how would a late fourth-century, perhaps middle-class,⁶ and most likely male, citizen spectator⁷ decode such a scene? Such a spectator would be sitting in the new Lycurgan Theatre of Dionysus,⁸ right underneath the great democratic monuments of a city now probably ruled by an oligarch (Demetrios of Phaleron),⁹ or possibly even enduring the sacrilege of a real-life *miles gloriosus* (Demetrios Poliorketes).¹⁰

There is much irony involved here. Indignation is not the sole emotional backdrop to the scene. The image of Glykera is strange enough to attract the audience's attention, but it is also evocative enough to energise theatrical memory: the tableau of a woman sitting with her hair concealed in mournful silence had been given cult status on the Athenian stage, first and foremost by the opening

⁶ Rosivach (2000) and Roselli (2011: 105–15) offer dissenting views regarding theatre audiences in Menander's time. Rosivach believes that despite the abolition of *theōrika* under the oligarchs, New Comedy remained mass entertainment, since the entrance fee of two obols was still affordable for most Athenians. Roselli, on the contrary, cites Hyp. 5.26 and Din. 1.56 as evidence of a possible increase of the fee to five drachmas, which in combination with the abolished *theōrika* would render theatre attendance a burden for the lower classes. It is an open question, however, whether this *theōricon* Hyperides and Dinarchus talk about was actually the compensation for the theatre per se. By this period the term *theōricon* covered state subsidies for participation in other public events as well (cf. Suda θ 219). But even if the five drachmas were meant for the theatre, was this the price of the seat alone? Other contemporary sources, such as Dem. 18.28, suggest that the price for the seat remained two obols.

⁷ On women among theatre audiences in Athens, see Henderson (1991); Goldhill (1994); Roselli (2011: 158–94).

⁸ On the Theatre of Lycurgus and the sociology of theatre in this period, see Roselli (2011: 75–81).

⁹ There is no clear evidence about the original time or place of the *Perikeiromene*. That the action may be set in Corinth (this, too, is only a plausible assumption) does not say much. On dating Menander's *Perikeiromene* sometime between 315 and 303 BC, see Arnott (1996b: 372); Dixon (2005: 131–2).

¹⁰ On Demetrios Poliorketes' shameful conduct during his stay in Athens, cf. Philippiades, fr. 25 K.-A., with Olson (2007: 224–6). Demetrios reputedly imprinted his image as a military master of the universe on the theatre itself, apparently on a wooden panel facing the audience (Douris ap. Athen. 12.536a). Dixon's argument (2005) that the *Perikeiromene* in general and the soldier Polemon in particular are an extended metaphor castigating Demetrios' monarchic excess is rather weak, in my opinion, but the point remains that if this play was staged during Demetrios' regime some sort of semantic cross-pollination between theatre and interstate politics is not unlikely, at least as one interpretive possibility, especially since the *Perikeiromene* reverberates with such themes as wanton violence, coercion and domination.

act of Aeschylus' *Niobe*.¹¹ Aeschylus' version of the story, perhaps the first among many to follow, was still notorious in the time of Menander: by then it had become a cultural archetype of heroic grief. Allusion to the *Niobe, para prosdokian*, would paint a highly atmospheric *fondo* to the scene and function perfectly as an attention grabber. Similarly enough, Menander's *Aspis* opens with what looks like a funerary procession. There, too, Daos enters in stony silence, and for several seconds at least prior to the first spoken words the action focuses on an inanimate object, Kleostratos' broken shield, which encapsulates the stakes of the play. With Glykera sitting still and dumb in mournful silence, her ravished head all the more foregrounded by her attempt to conceal it, the *Perikeiromene*, which by generic imperative should revolve around the social mechanics of marriage, instead opens surprisingly with the opposite, a funereal impression.

An 'intertextual soundtrack' of mourning is thus ushered into the *Perikeiromene* by the tragic essence of the opening scene. To be sure, this tragic essence would hold, even regardless of the possible *Niobe*-intertext: it is secured by the misguided nature of Polemon's actions and the largely self-induced suffering of Glykera: Glykera is innocent of the presumed adultery, but still her plight here is the product of her own choices, since she does not reveal Moschion's identity, as she could have done. This aura of mourning underscores the ironies evoked by Glykera's lacerated hair.

The following is an important point to ponder. In Greek culture, hair-cutting was commonly associated with lamentation. On the tragic stage particularly, shorn girls had their special mask, the mournful and sallow *kourimos parthenos* ('the shorn girl').¹² One can only wonder to what extent Glykera's mask – definitely a custom-made or otherwise re-fashioned one, as no female

¹¹ Cf. Ar. *Ran.* 911–26. On vase paintings relating to *Niobe*, cf. Taplin (2007: 74–9). On Aeschylean silences in general, see Taplin (1972).

¹² Pollux, 4.140, Tragic Mask No. 26: 'the shorn girl, instead of *onkos*, has hair brushed down and parted and cut short all round, and is sallow in complexion' (ἡ δὲ κούριμος παρθένος ἀντὶ ὄγκου ἔχει τριχῶν κατεψηγμένων διάκρισιν, καὶ βραχέα ἐν κύκλῳ περικέκται, ὕπωχρος δὲ τὴν χροιάν).

New Comedy mask had shorn hair – called to mind the tragic *kourimos*. If so, a whole space for intertextual allusions was opened up by the mask alone. However, this is not the whole story. Greek culture associated hair-cutting also with the prenuptial custom of a bride-to-be sacrificing a specially grown lock of hair to a deity that oversees transitions.¹³ The latter action, naturally, is symbolic, so the impact on the hair is minimal. In the funereal situation, on the contrary, ‘the mourner in effect “wears” his loss on his head’.¹⁴ Glykera would cut a lock if she was preparing for a (comic) wedding; now having had her hair shorn off, she evokes ritual mourning and tragic grief.

The irony goes even deeper. Mournful and prenuptial hair sacrifice is intentional; Polemon’s deed is intrusive and brutal. Shearing Glykera’s head raises the issues of domination and consent – ironically so, inasmuch as in this play Glykera is supposedly ‘*kyrios* of herself’ (κυρία ἑαυτῆς, *Perik.* 497). At the ingenious suggestion of George Bernard Shaw, Gilbert Murray translated the title Περικειρομένη as *The Rape of the Locks* (after Alexander Pope’s mock-heroic poem).¹⁵ Polemon’s offence was indeed an act of symbolic rape done by a character whose type plays with Greek discourses of epic heroism (see [Chapter 4](#)). Rape in Greek terms signifies sexual intercourse without the consent not so much of the woman herself, but of the woman’s *kyrios*.¹⁶ The rape of Glykera’s locks is singularly suggestive. As a falsification of a prenuptial ritual, it crashes any illusions that concubinage could ever acquire any moral or legal legitimacy. At the same time, nonetheless, Polemon’s cruelty initiates the process of re-establishing Glykera’s birthrights and of rehabilitating the *pallakē* into the ranks of ‘respectable’ women: the rape of the locks marks the ‘death’ of *pallakeia* and the beginning of its transformation into a genuine marital union.

Let us now move away from the stage and towards the auditorium. Only a few words, if any, must have been exchanged at the

¹³ Cf. Sommer (1912). On funereal and prenuptial rituals and their interlocking treatment in tragic drama, see Rehm (1994).

¹⁴ Leitao (2003: 113). ¹⁵ Murray (1942).

¹⁶ On consent and rape in Greece, see Omitowoju (2002).

opening of *Perikeiromene*, before Sosias broke in. To judge from the Ephesos and Antioch representations, the audience was confronted with a static, yet pregnant, visual image, able to generate a range of cultural, literary and theatrical associations. In order to ‘read’ this image, the spectator was obviously expected to perceive the significance of the way actors positioned their bodies in relation to one another on the stage (proxemics and blocking). The spectator was expected to examine their movements (or lack thereof) and observe character-drawing differences in them (kinesics). He or she should also study the personages’ scenic apparatus, what Aristotle called *opsis*, to garner information on *ēthos* as well as on the plot. And, finally, moving beyond the surface, the spectator was apparently supposed to activate: (a) theatrical memory (giving perspective to the scene by making associations with tragedy, maybe Aeschylus’ *Niobe* in particular); (b) cultural awareness (ironically contrasting nuptial and funereal customs); and, definitely, (c) civic ideology (in order to grasp the ‘otherness’ of the professional soldier, in a play that emphasises strongly that ‘soldier’ and ‘citizen’ are incompatible categories).¹⁷ Amidst all this influx of information, afforded by criss-crossing visual cues and literary or cultural intertexts, the script alone could take Menander’s spectator only so far.

In theatrical performance a script is uniquely and ephemerally realised within a defined cultural and historical context (literary, artistic, socio-economic, (geo)political, etc.). Chapter 1 argued that Menander’s performance in particular requires the action to be read, all at once, at least on three interwoven levels: urban, ideological and archetypal. Studying Menander’s performance, therefore, demands alertness to a complex web of allusions, which create a thick discursive texture around a mundane, if cleverly crafted, plot. What we are dealing with is not only an inherently intertextual text (script), but a subtly referential spectacle overall, a form of performance in which allusion was not necessarily achieved by virtue of verbal markers, but also by the ability of

¹⁷ Cf. the telling words of Pataikos in *Perik.* 1017–18: ‘From now on relinquish your soldier self, Polemon, so that you act impetuously no more’ (τὸ λοιπὸν ἐπιλαθοῦ στρατιώτης ὄν, [ἵνα ἰ προπετεὺς ποιήσης μηδὲ ἔν, [Πολέμων, πάλιν).

the visual element, too, to make references to various semiotic systems collaborating in the creation of theatrical meaning. Intertextuality, in the case of Menander, encompassed intervisual-ity as well.

That said, the following point must be pressed hard from the beginning. New Comedy is not a 'spectacular' show, but a fairly modest and tame one compared with the extravagance of contemporary tragedy and, of course, Old Comedy. This constitutes a paradoxical reversal: comedy is no longer the privileged ground of grand spectacle. However, I submit, *opsis* is prominent in New Comedy, inasmuch as the visual has an allusive function, as dense and sophisticated as never before, as far as one can ascertain. If New Comedy, as I maintained in [Chapter 1](#), is indeed intertextual in its own special manner, the visual is part and parcel of this intertextuality.

Performance studies, theatre archaeology and the study of Menander's performance

Albeit 'on very soft focus',¹⁸ awareness that stagecraft is essential for understanding theatre has been a staple since antiquity. Sophisticated relevant commentaries can be found interspersed in classical texts from Aristotle to the Scholiasts.¹⁹ That said, of course, performance criticism, a metalanguage, which evaluates plays 'in and as performance',²⁰ cannot be reduced simply to studying the theatrical execution of dramatic texts. The study of performance, as the *Perikeiromene* example shows, is a complex and freighted enterprise. It encompasses analysis of all the semiotic components of theatre in their real-time interaction, but also engages archetypes, paradigms, biases, stereotypes, ideologies and all possible other 'filters', which render theatrical signifiers meaningful for particular audiences (and arguably less meaningful for others).

Thus, performance analysis is more analysis of a discourse, not merely of signs. This discourse is textual and intertextual, visual

¹⁸ Osborne (2008: 395).

¹⁹ See, e.g., Arist. *Poet.* 1455a22–9[Long.], 15.7. On the Scholiasts, see Falkner (2002).

²⁰ Goldhill (1989).

and intervisual. It must describe a collaborative, multi-tiered event. In the case of post-classical theatre performance, such awareness is made all the more urgent, inasmuch as the space of the theatre was a multi-use field of social transaction, which housed a variety of performative occasions – all the more so as time went by. From the ‘high’ of theatre to the ‘low’ of mime and other forms of popular spectacles, and from the solemnity of public processions and religious rituals to the histrionics of imperial adulation in Roman times, the *theatron* could not but generate semantic cross-pollination between the various *dramata* performed in it, theatrical as well as political. We should conceive the study of performance as a situated, emplaced and context-bound, and yet flexible and open-ended interpretive endeavour, which needs to be sensitive to a whole web of interlocking cultural associations.

Theatre archaeology is a significant tool in ancient performance studies, yet one that must be used with caution. Let me assess briefly here its specific role in the study of New Comedy performance, to provide the necessary background for the comments to be made further on about theatrical space and the mask. The study of New Comedy performance is predicated on a pair of conditions, which render it quite antipodal to the study of fifth-century theatre: on the one hand, a tantalising scarcity of texts surviving complete; on the other hand, we possess a wealth of scattered and heterogeneous, yet still invaluable, archaeological testimonies, attesting to a vibrant, ‘international’ theatrical tradition of comic drama, which claimed at least an equal share of popularity with tragedy in the imaginary of the Hellenistic and early Imperial periods. Finds like the terracotta masks in Lipari²¹ or Centuripe;²² the aforementioned mosaics of Ephesos and Antioch, plus those from the House of Menander in Mytilene²³ and the Villa of Cicero in Pompeii (Naples 9985),²⁴ the paintings of masks on the Gnathia

²¹ See especially Bernabò Brea (1981), (2001); for tragic masks in Lipari, Bernabò Brea (1998: 41–78).

²² Simon (1989).

²³ Charitonidis, Kahil and Ginouvès (1970), with Csapo (2010: 140–67).

²⁴ Donderer (1989: 59–61). For a recent discussion of the representations of scenes from Menander’s *Theophoroumene*, see Nervegna (2010).

vases,²⁵ a score of figurines representing characters in action (e.g., the Myrina²⁶ and the Morgantina²⁷ figurines, or the so-called Loeb group for a more transitional phase),²⁸ are extremely useful – even more so, as they interface with Julius Pollux's *Onomasticon*, Book 4, 133ff. (second century AD),²⁹ the most comprehensive written source on material theatre at our disposal, which for all its limitations harks firmly back to authoritative early Hellenistic sources.³⁰

All the archaeological evidence relating to New Comedy is now collected and analysed in the third edition of T. B. L. Webster's *Monuments Illustrating New Comedy* (*MINC*³), which was revised and enlarged by J. R. Green and A. Seeberg. The taxonomic principles in this collection are nuanced and suggestive of a method for exploiting the material. Dramatic literature and theatre-related archaeological material are mutually informative, but each should be read according to their own distinct set of rules. In the case of artefacts: (a) the date of the original artefact; (b) the place of manufacture and the findspot; (c) the medium employed and its restrictions (terracotta, stone sculpture, pottery, paintings and drawings, mosaics, coins and tokens, gems, lamps, etc.); and (d) the iconographic tradition of that particular medium and in general³¹ can all alter the face value of any information performance analysis may hope to derive from archaeology.

Two specific examples indicated by the editors of *MINC*³ will illustrate this point. The first regards the increase in the number of Old Men and Slave masks in what *MINC*³ calls 'Period 2' of New Comedy archaeology (150–50 BC), as opposed to the predominance of Young Men and Women masks in the period 325–150 BC. Does this reflect a twist in the genre, a different kind of comedy

²⁵ Webster (1951); J. R. Green (1989). ²⁶ Mollard (1963). ²⁷ Bell (1981).

²⁸ Webster, Green and Seeberg (1995). Henceforth, *MINC*³.

²⁹ Attempts to connect Pollux's types with archaeological finds include Robert (1911), a seminal study; Roth (1913); Navarre (1914); Bieber (1930); Webster (1949), (1952). For attempts to cross-check Pollux's catalogue against the pseudo-Aristotelian *Physiognomics*, see, e.g., Krien (1955); Poe (1996).

³⁰ For a good collection of general studies on Pollux, see Bearzot, Landucci and Zecchini (2007), with further bibliography, but, deplorably, without a chapter on theatre. On ancient treatises on drama, some of which furnished Pollux's material, directly or indirectly, see Bagordo (1998).

³¹ *MINC*³, vol. 1, 53.

being produced in 150–50 BC? The editors of *MINC*³ are sceptical, and rightly so: representations of theatre cannot be isolated from the *context* in which they were placed and found.³² The so-called Megarian bowls (*MINC*³ 2AV), whence much of our material for this period derives, have a festive context, ‘where Old Men’s masks are particularly popular as representing or typifying the comic theatre in general’.³³ The concomitant question, avoided by *MINC*³ – why Old Men, since in other cases slaves or other character types perform this function – is indicative of the complexity of the issue, but does not detract much from the conclusion that oftentimes theatrical representations make generic references to theatre in its symbolic dimensions (the comic mask as a symbol of festivity and wellbeing), hence they bear little on contemporary theatre practice.

The second example adds two further reasons why archaeological testimonies need to be used with caution. The archaeological record attests that whereas mask representations in Menander’s time privilege young heroes and heroines, figurines from the same period constitute the domain of slaves and cooks. The editors suppose that the discrepancy may stem from a specific tradition according to which figurines represent ‘funny men and stock situations’, but they suspect that it may also be related to the existence of distinct markets for masks and figurines, one, the market for masks, opting for ‘the “intellectual” reception of Menandrian comedy’, and the other, for figurines, preferring ‘the broad humour of comedy as performed on stage’.³⁴ Whether this latter explanation is believed or not, the example certainly allows for the possibility that the genre and the intended clientele of the artefacts may be a factor that distorts the picture as to the relation between pictorial representation of theatre and stage practice.

The final admonition is broader, but just as significant. We should never lose sight of the fact that the material in our possession is not the relic of actual theatrical events. What we have are, at best, images of performances *post eventum*; objects of art, that

³² For a survey of theatrical motifs found in non-theatrical archaeological contexts, see J. R. Green (1995).

³³ *MINC*³, vol. 1, 79. ³⁴ *MINC*³, vol. 1, 79.

is, used for a variety of non-theatrical purposes, such as dedication to shrines (by victorious actors, *chorēgoi*, troupes), or for trade (souvenirs of performances), decoration, show of culture and/or declaration of 'Greekness', and so on. These images seem in most cases to be fairly accurate repositories of theatrical memory; however, the unique, corporeal, living objects of performance have been irrevocably lost, because, like all theatre, they were ephemeral. For one, they were constructed with perishable material: masks, for instance, were made of thin, stuccoed linen,³⁵ wood,³⁶ perhaps leather. Of course, even if we had a 'real' theatrical mask, it would be just as 'dead' as its terracotta counterpart: theatrical masks, unlike their reproducible blueprints, live only (and shortly) in performance; they are bound to the moment. The duplicates or otherwise derivative renditions we can touch and feel are nothing but the bare bones of what the actor, employing voice, gesture, dance and overall comportment, along with a clever exposure of the mask to light and shade at different angles relative to the audience, brought to life on the stage of a particular Greek city on a particular day in the context of a particular festival.

It is fitting to conclude this section with one final example, taken from the latest Menander-related archaeological discovery, the Menander mosaics from Antioch (Figure 2.2). The discussion of one particular piece of new information furnished by this discovery, namely, the mask worn by the soldier Polemon of *Perikeiromene*, will reveal how the archaeological record can be of ambiguous value, hence it should be approached with reserve. Theatre-related archaeological findings can shake long-held beliefs, even expose the shortcomings of other sources, like Pol-lux's catalogue in the case of the mask, but can still raise more questions than they can answer.

³⁵ Schol. Ar. *Ran.* 406; Isidore of Seville, *Etym.* x, 119. The linen was glued together (*katakollatai*).

³⁶ Hesychius, κ 4501, κ 4678, κ 4684; Prudentius, *Contra Symmachum* II, 647–8; Servius on Verg. *Georg.* 2.387. Hesychius and Servius provide evidence concerning probably ritual rather than theatrical masks (of Italy, in two of the four cases). Prudentius (c. 400 AD) refers specifically to a *tragicus cantor*, who *ligno tegit ora cavato*.

In the Antioch mosaic (Gutzwiller and Çelik 2012: 583, fig. 12), which, as said, depicts almost certainly the beginning of Menander's *Perikeiromene*, the soldier Polemon is wearing, unmistakably and surprisingly, the second *episeistos* mask: he has blond locks falling on his forehead and a fair complexion. Strocka (1977), although that case was far less clear, had already seen blond hair on the soldier figure of the Ephesos mosaic,³⁷ which belongs to the same iconographic tradition³⁸ and depicts the same *Perikeiromene* scene in a practically identical fashion. At first sight, then, the Antioch mosaic appears to confirm that Menander could exploit a different mask, the second rather than the first *episeistos*, to add nuance to the traditional figure of the pompous, cowardly professional *miles*. If so, then: (a) both *episeistos* masks, not just the first, as Pollux suggests, could belong to a professional-soldier type; and (b) as seems to be the case also with the two parasite masks,³⁹ the second *episeistos*, rather than pitting the soldier against an ethically cognate rival, as I suggested once myself (Petrides 2005b), is actually a variation of the soldier ethos. At first glance, it would even look as if the very existence of such a variation in the New Comedy mask system, the very possibility that Menander could cast at least some of his soldiers in the second *episeistos* mask, could also explain the divergence of such soldiers as Polemon or Thrasonides (*Misoumenos*) from the 'type' of the *miles gloriosus* (as per the principle that different masks cast different characters on stage).⁴⁰

Doubts and uncertainties remain, however; they are strong and they should not be dismissed lightly. The first doubt is all-encompassing and it touches upon a reality of the Hellenistic

³⁷ Strocka, nonetheless, identifies the Ephesos mask with the *panchrēstos*, not the second *episeistos* – rashly so, since the *panchrēstos* (Pollux Comic Mask No. 10) is *hyperythros* (reddish) in complexion, but there is no indication that he has blond hair. A wall painting from the House of the Comedians at Delos (Gutzwiller and Çelik 2012: 583, fig. 15), which depicts a scene of similar structure to that of the Ephesos and Antioch mosaics, gives the central figure much darker hair. However, the attribution of this painting to the *Perikeiromene* is uncertain.

³⁸ Presumably, they are harking back to an authoritative Hellenistic original. According to some scholars this original may even belong to a series of Menandrian illustrations put on display in Athens around 270 BC: see Gutzwiller and Çelik (2012: 579); bibliography in n. 32.

³⁹ See Chapter 4. ⁴⁰ On this, see the last section of this chapter.

theatre often disregarded by scholars (it will be expounded in more detail in the next section). Menander's plays were repeatedly re-performed in a variety of venues across the Greek world by travelling troupes of actors, who were not shy of taking liberties even with the written text. Even if we accept, then, for the sake of argument that the Antioch mosaic records faithfully an actual Menandrian show, exactly as it was seen by the artist or his source(s), which performance is it that it records: the original Athenian opening or a re-performance of *Perikeiromene* in a different part of the Greek world by a *didaskalos* other than Menander? At the end of the day we cannot determine for certain whether this iconographical source reflected Menander's actual casting of masks for the premiere of *Perikeiromene*, or whether the artist depicted the choices of a subsequent *didaskalos*, or indeed, whether the Ephesos painting and the Antioch mosaic do not reflect any actual performance at all, but have a readerly provenance, thus reflecting the artist's own perception of the characters, which was the result of studying the script rather than watching the play. Late antique sources, whether written or figurative, can take us only so far towards identifying Menander's masks 'archaeologically'.

To anticipate our claims regarding the mask and the need for it always to be acknowledged in the analysis of Menander's plays – a necessity fraught with pitfalls, but still a necessity (see the last section of this chapter and [Chapter 5](#)) – let us push this discussion one step further. Even if we accept that Menander himself prescribed the second *episeistos* for Polemon, was it a general rule that this kind of unconventional soldier was to be played with this mask? And if so, was the second *episeistos* confined exclusively to soldiers or could it be used freely also for other youths of similar *ēthos* (as seems to me still to be the likeliest scenario)? Certainly, not all of Menander's earnest and sympathetic soldiers are fit for the second *episeistos*. Stratophanes of *Sikyonioi*, for one, who is 'very manly-looking', and whose theatricality rests on a stark antithesis with white Moschion, can hardly be imagined to play with the whitish second *episeistos*.⁴¹ Although he is neither

⁴¹ See [Chapter 4](#).

an *alazon* (an empty braggart) nor a knave, Stratophanes must be wearing the first *episeistos* – unless Menander could present a professional soldier without either of the *episeistoi*, but with a completely different mask, say, the *melas* (Pollux, Comic Mask No. 11). I consider this unlikely, but one cannot be conclusive.

Such and many more are the intriguing questions raised by the archaeological record, a useful yet qualified instrument for understanding Menander. The Antioch evidence must be taken only for what it is: an iconographic indication of some sort, not evidence of universal value as regards the soldier mask(s). Not all Menander's 'particular' soldiers were played with the second *episeistos*, which notionally fits other characters, too, such as Chaerea of Terence's *Eunuchus* (see [Chapter 3](#)). What is safe to say, though, is that the second *episeistos* in *Perikeiromene*, and perhaps in *Misoumenos*, serves a semiotic purpose specific to the construction of the two protagonists. The second *episeistos* is hardly a 'gentle' mask, as Strocka (1977) claims: physiognomically speaking, its leonine temperament predisposes the character to fits of violence or outbursts of extreme emotion, not unlike those of Polemon and Thrasonides, or indeed those of Chaerea.

A new performance culture

With these preliminary thoughts in mind, let us now turn first to the cultural environment in which Menander's genre was developed and then to some of the genre's innovative characteristics, in order to grasp what was essentially 'new' in New Comedy performance. The section that follows is indispensable for establishing the correct frame of analysis: it is too easy sometimes to forget that New Comedy, which conventionally starts after the death of Alexander, is not only the swan song of classical Greek theatre, but also the crack of dawn for the theatre of Hellenism.

The sheer vehemence of the opposition on the part of contemporary thinkers such as Plato or Aristotle bespeaks a major paradigm shift in fourth-century perceptions regarding the balance of the visual and the verbal in performance. New Comedy audiences seem to have been by now fully awakened to the fact that theatre is first and foremost a performative, not a 'poetic', art, hence the

visual was *sine qua non* for theatre to be realised in all its thrillingly ‘psychagogic’ dimensions. It appears that theoretical consciousness of that major tenet of performance studies – that the script is by definition always lacunose – may not have sprung as late, but it was certainly solidified in the course of the fourth century BC.

Edith Hall rightly regards the ‘theorisation’ of theatre as one of the many ‘cultural revolutions that transformed Athens in the period 430–380 BC.’⁴² She focuses on the practical consequences that thinking about theatre precipitated in these crucial fifty years. Most momentously, theorisation launched a discussion of generic attributes, as well as generic boundaries;⁴³ hence, we must add, since much of the thinking about theatre was actually carried out in the moment of doing theatre on stage (Antiphanes fr. 189 K.-A. and Timocles fr. 6 K.-A. should provide suggestive, explicit evidence),⁴⁴ theorisation introduced a bold process of generic intersection, a form of experimental *Kreuzung der (theatralischen) Gattungen*, so to speak, which would be the hallmark of the fourth century. Euripides creates a tradition of pathetic, action-packed, spectacular and ‘romantic’ tragedy with comic elements; comedy integrates tragic structures, diction and scenic features, first by way of parody and eventually by way of a bold ‘urbanisation’ of mythological themes; satyr drama, finally, finds a new lease of life by verging towards topicality and slapstick, thus embracing the mode comedy had largely left behind.⁴⁵

In fact, the period 430–380 BC constituted only the tentative commencement of systematic theatrological reflection, which would intensify in the course of the fourth century.⁴⁶ Eventually, this reflection invested the practice of making and watching

⁴² Hall (2007: 272–4).

⁴³ On the issue, see recently Foley (2008). Arnott (1972) and Csapo (2000) chart the territory for Comedy.

⁴⁴ On poetological reflection in Middle Comedy, see Konstantakos (2003–4).

⁴⁵ Cf. Cipolla (2003: 271ff).

⁴⁶ Plato’s preoccupation with theatre ran far deeper than the dismissive remarks of the various characters in his dialogues. Quite possibly it even went beyond the level of theoretical reflection. As Charalabopoulos (2012) argues, the very form of the Platonic dialogue can be seen as an experiment in dramatic production alternative to, and ‘corrective’ of, the versions of the stage (including his own youthful experiments).

theatre with unprecedented self-consciousness. These cumulative layers of *sophia*, a blend of practical and theoretical savvy, complemented by other relevant factors, such as the growing professionalism of theatrical agents (actors, impresarios, makers of masks and other stage properties, musicians, etc.) and the expanding literacy and book culture,⁴⁷ gradually metamorphosed theatrical performance into a much more technically educated experience on all sides (producers, performers and at least parts of the audience).

Theatre now possesses symbolic and ideological significance so pervasive that Lycurgus could name the committee responsible for the entire financial management of the polis *hoi epi to theōrikon* (Aeschin. 3.25).⁴⁸ Public performances (processions, appearances in court and the Ecclesia)⁴⁹ are themselves becoming ever more self-consciously ‘theatrical’. One notorious case of spectacle making the difference in a court of law involved Hyperides and the celebrated courtesan Phryne; see Athen. 15. 590d–e:

ὁ δὲ Ὑπερίδης (fr. 181 Bl) συναγορεύων τῇ Φρύνῃ, ὥς οὐδὲν ἦν ἔγωγε ἐπιδοξοῖ τε ἦσαν οἱ δικασταὶ καταψηφιοῦμενοι, παραγαγὼν αὐτὴν εἰς τοὺς μανῆς καὶ περιρρήξας τοὺς χιτωνίσκους γυμνὰ τε τὰ στέρνα ποιήσας τοὺς ἐπιλογικούς οἰκτοὺς ἐκ τῆς ὀψεως αὐτῆς ἐπερρητόρευσεν δεισιδαιμονῆσαι τε ἐποίησεν τοὺς δικαστὰς τὴν ὑποφῆτιν καὶ ζάκορον Ἀφροδίτης ἐλέω χαρισαμένους μὴ ἀποκτεῖναι.

Hyperides, who was defending Phryne in court, seeing that words were not doing his case any good, and since the judges gave every appearance of being ready to condemn his client, presented the woman herself in front of the court, tore her tunic open, and put her naked chest on display. And with this visual image constituting the closing statement with which he sought the mercy of the judges, he managed to instil superstitious fear into them, so that they decided, showing pity to the prophet and priestess of Aphrodite, not to give her the death penalty.

⁴⁷ On literacy, education and the spread of book culture in the classical and early Hellenistic period, see Kenyon (1951); Harris (1989: 65–115, 139–46); and R. Thomas (2009) for useful general surveys and the necessary corrections of earlier idealisations; Robb (1994: 214–51), on the fourth century in particular; Yunis (2003), on the ‘emergence of the critical reader’ mainly in the course of the fourth century; and Hunter (2003) on Theocritus and the cultural change that distinguishes the Hellenistic phase.

⁴⁸ Cf. Wilson (2000: 266).

⁴⁹ On the ‘performance culture’ of Athens, see especially Goldhill (1999).



Figure 2.3 Jean-Léon Gérôme, 'Phryne revealed before the Areopagus' (oil on canvas, 1861)

The anecdote evokes a pathetic and highly theatrical(ised) scene (Figure 2.3). Hyperides capitalises brilliantly on the psychagogic elements of *opsis*. He creates an eye-catching tableau, which calls to mind a mythological paradigm: the famous epic incident of Menelaus' dropping his sword at the sight of Helen's naked breast (cf. *Ar. Lys.* 155–6), an archetypal example of male helplessness in the face of superior female splendour. At the same time, the image preys on the jurists' religious superstition: Phryne's blameless beauty, reputedly Apelles' and Praxiteles' model for their respective Aphrodite Anadyomene and Aphrodite Knidia, was to be seen by the jurists as almost divine. As logical arguments began to fail him, Hyperides excited in the audience pity (*oiktous*) and fear (*deisidaimonēesai*) by way of *opsis* – and carried the day.

By the time of Menander theatrical shows were fast overshadowing any other product exported from Athens to the wider Greek world. Theatre was no longer a mostly Athenian form of performance art; it was a universal social phenomenon essential for conceptualising the whole idea of the polis as an institution much beyond Athens (in fact, so much so that the presence or absence of a theatre building is a chief criterion in the very identification of various settlements as *poleis*).⁵⁰ Theatre was also establishing itself rapidly as a token of civility, culture and Greekness. The ubiquity of theatre, for example, in the 'social semiotics' of Theophrastus' *Characters*, where behaviour during theatrical

⁵⁰ Pausanias, 9.4.1.

festivals is often a decisive factor for typecasting,⁵¹ as well as the aforementioned recurrence of theatrical paradigms, analogies, vocabulary or other references everywhere, from forensic oratory to philosophy to ordinary speech, are evidence that by the fourth century, and increasingly afterwards, theatre engrossed Greece more overpoweringly than ever before. The casual air whereby Menander's characters, for instance, evoke tragic counterparts for mundane situations may well reflect actual social practice (but see [Chapter 1](#)).

In the fourth century, therefore, and increasingly from then on, theatre was not just good to think about; it was good to think with. However, as a result of the theatrical art's newfound 'celebrity', theoretical reflection on theatre also exposed a number of rifts and tensions, which rendered it a philosophical battlefield. Theatricality⁵² gradually found itself to be the point of contention in a philosophical tug-of-war between: (a) reality and conscious illusion or suspension of disbelief (Gorgias, the sophist); (b) reality and representation (Plato); or (c) representation verbal and enacted (Aristotle). Theorisation, that is, was a tense process, which added density to the theatrical experience, but also marked the beginning of a long anti-theatrical bias, which centred on the growing importance of spectacle and the spectacular.⁵³

Aristotle is particularly emblematic of this pendulum, which swung between a grudging acknowledgement of the new reality and a call for control. Theatre was assumed by Aristotle to be sliding towards a form of pernicious *psychagōgia* (the word means literally: 'carrying away the soul') by way of *opsis*, the visual dimension of performance. Aristotle's statements on *opsis*

⁵¹ This is, for instance, the case for the Man of Petty Ambition (Character7), who will sit near the generals in the theatre; the Avaricious Man (Character 26), who takes his sons to performances only when admission is free, and so on. For commentaries *ad loc.* see Diggle (2004).

⁵² On the notion of theatricality in modern theory, see especially Davis and Postlewaite (2003: 1–39).

⁵³ On the various attitudes to theatre in Antiquity and beyond, see Theodorakopoulos (2004).

are notoriously ambiguous, however.⁵⁴ The ambiguities stem partly from Aristotle's well-known dithering between description and prescription; but they derive also from the ambivalence of the term *opsis* itself in Aristotle's oeuvre. *Opsis* in Aristotle denotes mainly the *apparatus scaenicus*, but it can also suggest, though reluctantly, the ontological duality of theatre as both text and spectacle.⁵⁵ Aristotle acknowledges that 'the arrangement of spectacle' (ὁ τῆς ὀψεως κόσμος) is for tragedy *morion ex anagkēs* ('a necessary part', *Poet.* 1449b31–3; cf. also *Poet.* 1454b15–6: τὰς ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἀκολουθούσας αἰσθήσεις τῇ ποιητικῇ). The attempt to create ideological and qualitative distinctions between tragedies that generate pity and fear, on the one hand *ek tēs opseōs*, and on the other hand, *ek tēs systaseōs tōn pragmatōn* ('from the composition of the plot', *Poet.* 1453b1–3), practically affirms the former as a least desirable (because it is *atechnoteron kai chorēgias deomenon*, 'less reducible to a set of rules and contingent upon financial expense', *Poet.* 1453b8), but yet all-too-real and apparently novel, theatrical mode. Its novelty is evinced by how quickly it is thought to be escalating towards the extreme (*Poet.* 1454b8ff.).

Aristotle, to be sure, is actually defending tragedy from the sweeping, uncompromising denunciation of Plato, who had censured drama as incurably mimetic. To that effect, he is suggesting a form of purism, which denies that performance is a prerequisite for tragedy. First, Aristotle distinguishes sharply the art of the poet from those of the actor, the *skeuopoios*, the musician, etc., although the latter are still acknowledged as inevitable (the *mise-en-scène* must, indeed, be visualised and anticipated by the poet, cf. *Poet.* 1455a22ff., in an attempt, among other things, to control and check the process, one suspects). It all comes down to the poet, Aristotle affirms, as tragedy can realise its potential *kai aneu*

⁵⁴ Among the vast literature, see the most recent contributions by Marzullo (1980); Halliwell (2000 [1986]: 337–43); di Marco (1989); Mesturini (1992); Bonanno (1999), (2000).

⁵⁵ Pace Halliwell (2000 [1986]: 338–9), we must allow this wider signification of the term *opsis* in Aristotle. That most of Aristotle's references to *opsis* seem to allude to the actors means simply that the actor and his apparatus comprised the chief visual signs in fourth-century performance. It need not mean that Aristotle neglected everything else.

tou horan ('even without the visual element', *Poet.* 1453b4); it can become *phanera dia tou anagnōskein* ('apparent through the act of reading', *Poet.* 1462a12–13). But, if it cannot avoid representation altogether, at least it should have a conservative approach to enactment, which eschews excess (*to phortikon*) and is addressed to the most competent and mature kind of spectator (*pros theatas epieikeis*, *Poet.* 1461b32–62a18). Finally, Aristotle demands that clever plot crafting and 'conductive' words take precedence over the sensationalism of the visual (*Poet.* 1453b3–7).

Paradoxically, Aristotle does nothing if not substantiate precisely how inalienable and ubiquitous *opsis* was in the fourth century, both in the theory and in the practice of performance. He confirms that contemporary practitioners and spectators alike consented that the visual is not a condiment but an overarching stipulation of drama. In fact, albeit in a textually problematic passage,⁵⁶ Aristotle may even be explicitly admitting, while not endorsing, this new supremacy of *opsis* over all other aspects of performance in the fourth century:

καὶ γὰρ ὁψις ἔχει πᾶν† καὶ ἦθος καὶ μῦθον καὶ λέξιν καὶ μέλος καὶ διάνοιαν
ὡσαύτως (*Poet.* 1450a13–14)

The current trend among scholars is to defend the *paradosis*, but interpret ἔχει variously as 'prevailed over' (Marzullo: 'hat ... überwältigt'), 'dominates over' (Lanza, Mesturini) or 'contains' (di Marco) the rest. The three translations, of course, have different semantic upshots. Di Marco's, more conservatively, evokes Aristotle's admission that the poet no longer enjoys full creative control over performance. Lanza's and Marzullo's imply an evolution and express an expostulation analogous to that of other famous dicta, such as Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1403b31ff. (on the supremacy of actors over poets),⁵⁷ Plato, *Resp.* 492b5ff. (on the power of

⁵⁶ See di Marco (1989: 133, n. 16), for a summary of scholarly discussions on the passage.

⁵⁷ 'One could say that these, the actors, are the ones who actually win the prizes in the competitions. The actors are more powerful than the poets nowadays. Something similar happens in the political competitions, too, because the citizens of today are knavish' (τὰ μὲν οὖν ἄλλα σχεδὸν ἐκ τῶν ἀγώνων οὗτοι λαμβάνουσιν, καὶ καθάπερ ἐκεῖ μείζον δύνανται νῦν τῶν ποιητῶν οἱ ὑποκριταί, καὶ κατὰ τοὺς πολιτικούς ἀγῶνας, διὰ τὴν μοχθηρίαν τῶν πολιτῶν).

audiences to sway public proceedings and corrupt the youth), or, indeed, Isocrates' despondent comparisons between the arrogance and conceit (*hyperēphaneia*, *alazoneia*) of fourth-century spectacles compared with the glorious past (Isoc. 7.53–4).⁵⁸ Perhaps most suggestive are the remarks of Plutarch in his work *De Gloria Atheniensium* (Mor. 348d8–349a) on the ostentatiousness of tragedies. This is a passage worth quoting in full. Plutarch's remarks are, of course, more pertinent to the fourth century than the fifth:

Βούλεσθε τοὺς ἄνδρας εἰσάγωμεν αὐτοὺς τὰ σύμβολα καὶ τὰ παράσημα τῶν ἔργων κομίζοντας, ἰδίαν ἐκατέρῳ πάροδον ἀποδόντες; ἔνθεν μὲν δὴ προσίτωσαν ὑπ' αὐλοῖς καὶ λύραις ποιηταὶ λέγοντες καὶ ᾄδοντες (Ag. *Ran.* 353) 'εὐφημεῖν χρή κάξιστασθαι τοῖς ἡμετέροισι <χοροῖσιν> | ὅστις ἄπειρος τοιῶνδε λόγων ἢ γνώμη μὴ καθαρεῖται, | ἢ γενναίων ὄργια Μουσῶν μήτ' ἦσεν μήτ' ἐχόρευσε, | μὴδὲ Κρατίνου τοῦ ταυροφάγου γλώσσης βακχεῖ' ἐτελέσθη· καὶ σκευὰς καὶ προσωπεῖα καὶ βωμοὺς καὶ μηχανὰς ἀπὸ σκηνῆς περιάκτους καὶ τρίποδας ἐπινικίους κομίζοντες· τραγικοὶ δ' αὐτοῖς ὑποκριταὶ [καὶ] Νικόστρατοι καὶ Καλλιππίδαι καὶ Μυννίσκοι καὶ Θεόδωροι καὶ Πῶλοι συνίτωσαν, ὥσπερ γυναικοὶ πολυτελοῦς τῆς τραγωδίας κομμῶται καὶ διφροφόροι, μᾶλλον δ' ὡς ἀγαλμάτων ἐγκουσταὶ καὶ χρυσῶται καὶ βαφεῖς παρακολουθοῦντες· σκευῶν δὲ καὶ προσώπων καὶ ξυστίδων ἀλουργῶν καὶ μηχανῶν ἀπὸ σκηνῆς καὶ χοροποιῶν καὶ δορυφόρων δυσπραγματευτοῦ λαὸς καὶ χορηγία πολυτελὴς παρασκευαζέσθω. πρὸς ἃ Λάκων ἀνὴρ ἀποβλέψας οὐ κακῶς εἶπεν, ὡς ἁμαρτάνουσιν Ἀθηναῖοι μέγαρα τὴν σπουδὴν εἰς τὴν παιδίαν καταναλίσκοντες, τοιούτῃ μεγάλων ἀποστόλων δαπάνας καὶ στρατευμάτων ἐφόδια καταχορηγοῦντες εἰς τὸ θέατρον. ἂν γὰρ ἐκλογισθῇ τῶν δραμάτων ἕκαστον ὅσου κατέστη, πλεον ἀνηλωκῶς φανεῖται ὁ δῆμος εἰς Βάκχας καὶ Φοινίσσας καὶ Οἰδίποδας καὶ Ἀντιγόνην καὶ τὰ Μηδείας κακὰ καὶ Ἡλέκτρας, ὧν ὑπὲρ τῆς ἡγεμονίας καὶ τῆς ἐλευθερίας πολεμῶν τοὺς βαρβάρους ἀνάλωσεν.

Do you wish that we introduce the men themselves bearing the symbols and the insignia of their achievements, giving each one their own *parodos* (entrance)? From that *parodos* then let the poets come under the sound of flutes and lyres, and let them sing and say: 'Now let them be quiet and steer clear of our chorus | whoever is untrained in such words or whose mind is unclean | or who has never sung or danced in the rites of the noble Muses | or who has never been introduced in the Bacchic rituals of the tongue of Cratinus, the bull-eater.' Let them bring their theatrical appurtenances, their masks and their altars and their stage machines and their *periaktoi* and their epinician tripods. Let the tragic actors, too, join in with them, the likes of Nikostratos and Kallippides and Mynniskos and Theodoros and Polos, as though tragedy is a woman living in

⁵⁸ Isocrates attacks the excessive expenditure of public displays in general, including the theatre.

luxury and they are her coiffeurs and couch-bearers, or rather as if they were the artists who put encaustic paint and gold-leaf and dye on an unadorned statue. Let them prepare a lavish *chorēgia* for stage accessories and masks and luxurious costumes and stage machinery and dancing masters and bodyguards, a crowd hard to manage. A Spartan having looked at these things was not off the mark saying that the Athenians are wasting their earnest efforts on fun fair, squandering in the theatre amounts equal to the expenses needed to furnish a large fleet or to support the needs of an army. For if we calculate how much each drama has cost, it transpires that the *dēmos* has spent more on the various *Bacchae* and *Phoenissae* and *Oedipuses* and *Antigones* and the miseries of the various Medeas and Electras than what they spent fighting against the barbarians for their own hegemony and freedom.

Such aphorisms certainly represent personal agendas and biases, but we should not discount their evidentiary value completely, as a mere ‘mythology of the fifth century’.⁵⁹ As they cluster up with a general distaste for the extravagance of public life at large expressed by aristocrats a few decades prior to the birth of Menander, they also accord very well with developments in the Hellenistic period, where theatricalisation, even a holistic perception of *vita publica* as a form of performance, was the norm.⁶⁰ J. J. Pollitt posited a ‘theatrical mentality’ as the hallmark of Hellenistic life.⁶¹ This is crucial: in the Hellenistic period, realising that ‘all the world’s a stage’ is not merely a philosophical stance, which assigned to Tyche the role of playwright in the drama of everyday life.⁶² It is also not simply the application of tragic structures in perceiving the course of history.⁶³ It entails – or rather, it is predicated upon – a sophisticated understanding of the semiotics of spectacle (of putting oneself on show) in public comportment. This is the advanced stage of an evolution, this time regarding the conception, execution and reception of *hypokrisis*, in theatre, in the Ecclesia or in court.

In this case, theorisation did not simply elaborate on a development that occurred outside the loci of performance: it constructed and imposed it. The various *Rhetorics*, which were being written

⁵⁹ Wilson (2000: 269). ⁶⁰ See Chaniotis (1997), (2009). ⁶¹ Pollitt (1986: 4).

⁶² For instance, Teles, fr. 5, 2–7 Hense. On the ‘dramatic simile of life’, see Kokolakis (1960).

⁶³ See Walbank (1960). For further applications of theatrical analogies, this time in Imperial Rome, see Edwards (2002).

already since the fifth century, but much more systematically from the fourth century onwards, gradually taught actors and orators, and by extension, Greek audiences, theatrical or other, how to read an 'endless array of public festivals'⁶⁴ in a semiotically erudite manner.⁶⁵ Hellenistic culture in general, and theatre by extension, was one in which *opsis* consciously played a dominant role, either in quantity (lavish, often kitschy public dramas) or in quality (growing alertness to the symbolic cachet of the visual: this latter skill is all-important in the performances of Menander). A culture of spectacle and spectators developed quickly and vigorously from the time of Alexander and onwards. Such a culture fell in neatly both with the power hunger of ambitious individuals and, even more so, with the need of sovereigns to propagate court ideology through spectacles of every kind. Voices of opposition petered out after Aristotle. When they resurfaced in late Hellenistic and Imperial times, theatre, as we know it, had largely run out of creative steam. But even in those cases, opposition to spectacle sounded almost dutiful, 'the right thing to do' for a *homo politus*, who may also have had other axes to grind.⁶⁶ Make no mistake: 'bread and games' (*panem et circenses*) may have been a phenomenon mainly of Rome and of Greece under Rome, and chiefly a development of the Imperial rather than the Hellenistic period, but the seeds of the phenomenon harked back to the period that formed Menander.

It is undeniable, therefore, that New Comedy starts life amidst a new performance culture *in statu nascendi*, a culture with not only a taste for spectacle, but also, most crucially, with the conceptual equipment required to read spectacle in minute detail. This minute

⁶⁴ Cf. Herakleides, fr. 1 Pfister: θεῶν συνεχεῖς.

⁶⁵ On the evidence see Ober and Strauss (1990); Fantham (2002), with further bibliography.

⁶⁶ Cicero, for instance, expresses his aristocratic distaste for popular performance in *Ad Fam.* 7.1. But this, we must not forget, is a letter to Marius: slamming the bothersome parade of extras in Accius' plays, as well as the rest of the spectacles Pompey set up for the crowds, is simply accentuating Pompey's coarseness and susceptibility to bad counsellors. Yet there is no denying even for Cicero that such entertainments 'enjoyed the admiration of the people' (*popularem admirationem habuerunt*). On popular entertainment in early imperial Rome, see Beacham (1999).

detail is most crucial for a genre like Menander's, which was not, as said, particularly spectacular, strictly speaking, but did invest considerably in the role of the visual. A comparison between the treatment of *hypokrisis* in Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, Book 3 (written c. 335–330 BC) and in Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, Book 11, [chapter 3](#) (written before AD 96), two major works that demarcate more or less the conventional chronological boundaries of the period of New Comedy, should be suggestive of how deeply Hellenistic practitioners of the twin performative arts of acting and oratory gradually delved into the minutiae of performance (this, we can be sure, was common stock from early on, at least to a certain extent) and even learned to appreciate and value them.

The contrast is stark. In *Rhetoric*, Book 3, Aristotle includes ὑπόκρισις into his discussion of style, the craft (*technē*) of *hōs dei eipein* ('how one should practise the art of speech'), which, he begrudgingly admits, contributes generously towards 'the appearance of quality in a speech' (φανεῖναι ποιόν τινα τὸν λόγον, *Rhet.* 1403b14–15). After all, 'everything around delivering a speech is a show (*phantasia*) addressed to the spectator' (*Rhet.* 1404a11). This conception of rhetorical speech as *phantasia* is pivotal. The distinction between fifth-century theatrical characters speaking *politikōs* ('like citizens') and their fourth-century counterparts *rhētorikōs* ('like professional orators') is one of the famous conundrums of the *Poetics* (1450b4–8), but the dominance of rhetoric in post-classical tragedy is beyond doubt. This kind of rhetoric, however, which furnished the verbal signs themselves with visual dynamic that needed to be delivered accordingly, was, so to speak, another device of theatrical spectacle.

Nevertheless, whereas Aristotle explicates an imposing variety of stylistic devices likely to enrich an argument and render it more 'visible' to the audience (metaphors, similes, connecting particles, the notion of dignity and propriety of style, rhythm, syntax, word order, imagery, apothegms, etc.), he suppresses as still *atechnoton*, not fully submitted (or submissible) to systematic analysis, all other aspects of *hypokrisis*. The only exception he acknowledges is controlling the voice, 'the most mimetic of human organs' (*Rhet.* 1404a21), by managing *megethos* (volume), *harmonia* (tone/pitch) and *rhythmos* (rhythm/flow of speech) aptly

‘towards the expression of each emotion’ (πρὸς ἕκαστον πάθος, *Rhet.* 1403b26–36). This, however, may well be Aristotle’s own prejudice preventing him from taking in (or validating) what was going on. Actors must have made much more headway in the 330s regarding the theorisation of their art than Aristotle admits.

Moving on to Quintilian, a few centuries down the road, we find voice management, pronunciation and enunciation covering only one-third of the relevant chapter on *actio* in the *Institutio Oratoria* (11.3.1–64). The other two-thirds (11.3.65–184) are devoted to gesture, body management and dress. Applying a physiognomical method,⁶⁷ Quintilian connects a number of body signs with their common ‘ethical’ readings, thus producing a sophisticated semiotics of actorial body language: he recognises nine different positions of the head (11.3.69–71); twelve misguided uses of the gaze (11.3.72–7); at least five different emotions signified by the eyebrows (11.3.78–9); seven indecorous uses of the nostrils (11.3.80) and ten of the lips (11.3.81); four ways in which the neck affects delivery (11.3.82); at least three ethical signifiers for the shoulders and arms (11.3.83–4). He even enumerates several ethical messages conveyed by clutching the fingers (11.3.92ff.). Suggestively, throughout this chapter Quintilian unfolds his advice on *actio* with constant parallel references to acting in the theatre, indeed, acting with masks (for instance, 11.3.73, 91, 111, 112) – evidence that the insights produced in *Institutio Oratoria* were the result of experimentation on the *pulpitum* as well as on the *rostrum*. Moreover, Quintilian’s association of body language with *ēthos* squares very well with the physiognomic focus on appearances (*to phainesthai*), which prevailed in Greek culture and art from the fourth century BC and without a doubt informed the sculpting of the late classical and Hellenistic theatrical mask (see below in this chapter). Whatever his personal embellishments to this exposition may have been, Quintilian is certainly the heir of three centuries’ worth of stylisation and codification in the art of *hypokrisis* (cf. 11.3.106: *veteres artifices*), which invested every last particle of the written text

⁶⁷ On physiognomics, see below in this chapter.

with performative codes, in a quest to make *ēthos* and *pathos*, disposition and emotion, that is, the preconditions of action (*praxis*), readable on the visual level as well. The distance covered from Aristotle to Quintilian is very long indeed. Aristotle chose to see in the rise of *hypokrisis* the abandonment of the creative control of the poet and the capitulation of theatre to the whims of spectators other than the *epieikeis*. In fact, the rise of *hypokrisis* and the concomitant ascendancy of *opsis* in its wider sense may well be seen as the dawn of a new era, where visual cues were just as preponderant as words, and where the subtlety involved in structuring the spectacle precludes any suspicion of crudeness on the part of the audience (still this is not postulating that audiences consisted exclusively of the elite).

The rise of this new kind of actor,⁶⁸ who so annoyed Aristotle and his peers (cf. *Poet.* 1461b26), was meteoric: a professional, highly trained, specialised *technitēs*, whose stage accomplishment was cashed out in celebrity and political office,⁶⁹ and who perhaps already by the end of the fourth century would be ‘unionised’, along with other theatre practitioners, in powerful, state-like organisations with unique privileges (οἱ περὶ τὸν Διόνυσον τεχνῖται).⁷⁰

It must be emphasised that the Dionysiac guilds were not actors-only clubs; they included practically all theatre practitioners, who vied for prizes in the festivals: protagonists and *synagonistai* (actors of second and third roles), *choreutai* (members of the chorus) and *chorodidaskaloi* (trainers of the chorus), musicians and, of course, poets. The very composition of the guilds can be seen as a token of a holistic new perception of theatre, which did away with the old pecking order. No longer regarded as sign of ‘decline’,⁷¹ this shift in theatrical hierarchies had been

⁶⁸ The best starting points for studying ancient actors are Ghiron-Bistagne (1976); Easterling and Hall (2002); Csapo (2010: esp. 83–139).

⁶⁹ On actors as celebrities, see Easterling (2002); Garland (2006: 105–16).

⁷⁰ On the Dionysiac guilds, see Aneziri (2003), with bibliography and an epigraphic appendix; also Le Guen (2001). For a Prosopography, see Stefanis (1988).

⁷¹ See the classic rebuttal of this now obsolete notion in Easterling (1993). Good discussions can also be found in Wallace (1995), (1997); Le Guen (1995), (2007). On the associated concept of the ‘death of the polis’ and the exaggerated arguments for and

underway at least since the inception of actor prizes in the Great Dionysia at 449 BC. Before us are several evolutionary channels whose trajectories may well cross, but we cannot pinpoint exactly how and where: the decline of the chorus (which shifted attention onto the *skēnē*),⁷² the actors shooting to stardom, and the performances becoming richer in visual signification involving both the *apparatus scaenicus*, acting, dancing and other elements (pathetic motifs, rhetoric and music, to name but a few).⁷³ Theatre evolves, for better or for worse, and along the way it engenders a correspondingly different theatrical culture.

Another development concomitant with the rise of the actor was the emergence of an international nexus of numerous new festivals comprising theatrical performances alongside other kinds of popular entertainment.⁷⁴ The new festivals were dispersed all over the wider Greek world and were accruing steadily throughout the Hellenistic period. Although still resolutely religious and political occasions, in the sense that they were attached to particular cults and mostly served some sort of ultimate purpose, they tended to claim *timē* (and other benefits) for the organisers (cities or Koina,⁷⁵ sovereigns,⁷⁶ or private *euergetai*⁷⁷) rather than to function as focal points for the community in the spirit of classical Athens.⁷⁸ Be that as it may, the festivals provided plentiful opportunities for all kinds of performances: new plays, revivals of old ones (tragedies,

against it, see now Ma (2008). Recent advocacies of theatrical 'decline' and the 'end of the polis' are Ghiron-Bistagne (1974); Kuch (1993).

⁷² On the gradual sidelining of the chorus in fourth-century theatre, which, of course, does not imply that the chorus at large as a cultural institution waned during this period, see Capps (1895); Maidment (1935); Sifakis (1971); Hunter (1979); Rothwell (1992). The attempt of Marshall (2002) to postulate a more active role for the chorus in Menander's *Dyskolos* is speculative, but interesting.

⁷³ On the supposed ills of 'New Music', which, championed first by Euripides and Agathon, swept the fourth century, the *locus classicus* is Plato *Leg.* 700a5ff. On New Music, see Csapo (2004).

⁷⁴ Cf. Tarn and Griffith (1952: 113): 'A complete list of the new Hellenistic festivals would fill a page.'

⁷⁵ Such as in Delphi, Tanagra, Oropus, Euboea, Argos, Dodona, Samos, Thespieae, Delos, Cos, Magnesia, Miletus, Pergamum, etc.

⁷⁶ Such as the Ptolemaia in Alexandria.

⁷⁷ Cf., for instance, *IG* ix 1, 694, for a privately organised Dionysia in Corcyra in 200 BC.

⁷⁸ Complete studies of the festivals in Delos and Delphi, among the most important ones in this age, are offered by Sifakis (1967).

comedies, even satyr plays) in agonistic contexts or not, solo performances of extracts, public or private.⁷⁹

The organisation, the quality and the renown of these festivals varied; all the same, strong evidence suggests that often, even during the lifetime of Menander, they provided much more attractive prospects for the Artists of Dionysus than Athens itself. The actor Athenodorus, for instance, is reported to have refused to appear in the Dionysia, for the sake of an appearance in the Athens-style *agōn* Alexander had set up in Tyre between the kings of Cyprus (Plut. *Alex.* 29). The great procession of Ptolemy in Alexandria (Athen. 5.198c) far surpassed in grandeur the *pompē* of Athens.⁸⁰ Furthermore, other festivals offered opportunities for exposure and monetary gain, the chief incentives of the Technitai, beyond any comparison with the still democratically minded Great Dionysia: such were, for example, Alexander's nine-day festival at Dion (Diod. 17.16.3–4); or the one at Ecbatana, where 3,000 Greek Technitai took part (Plut. *Alex.* 72.1); and, of course, his proverbially sumptuous Wedding Feast at Susa, where Alexander was so extravagant in his *dōreai* that οἱ πρότερον καλούμενοι Διονυσιοκόλακες (an apparently derisive variant for the Artists of Dionysus) Ἀλεξανδροκόλακες ἐκλήθησαν (Athen. 12.538cff.). Compared with this, the Great Dionysia must have seemed rather pale. But for some structural changes,⁸¹ the establishment of a state-controlled *agōnothesia* in place of *chorēgia* (between 317–307 BC),⁸² and the abolition of the *theōrikon* (estimated around 300 BC), the Dionysia remained fairly conservative. The 'end of Athenocentrism' does not simply mean that Athens stopped being the only place where important theatre was made – because to a large extent this would be inaccurate even for the

⁷⁹ See Gentili (2006: esp. 37–72). For the specific fortunes of Menander in these new contexts, see Nervegna (2013).

⁸⁰ On the Athenian *pompē*, see Csapo (2013).

⁸¹ Performance of old tragedy (386 BC, certainly from 341–339 BC), Old Comedy (339/311 BC) and old satyr play (before 254 BC); contest of comic actors (between 329–312 BC); change of place for satyr play (one single play at the beginning of the festival); and change in the system of distributing actors to poet: the chief actor now performs one play of each poet.

⁸² Cf. Wilson (2000: 270–6); Latini (2003); Summa (2003).

classical period;⁸³ it must mean that Athens was not even necessarily the prime hub of great theatre any more, especially from the third century onwards when the Dionysiac guilds increased enough in number, organisation and prestige to become practically the *primum movens* of Hellenistic theatrical activity.

To conclude this section, we should glimpse at the new Hellenistic theatre building, one final novelty tied to the rise of the actor and the increase of *opsis* in prestige and sophistication. The so-called ‘proscenium theatre’ with its high stage (occasionally, as high as 3.5 m) and the oblong *logeion* (only 2–3 m deep) created a barrier between the orchestra and the *skēnē* and gave new prominence to on-stage happenings. The tapered acting space created the effect of a relief⁸⁴ and accentuated the body of the actor on stage. The *skēnē* building, moreover, could be highly ornate with *thyromata* bearing atmospheric paintings. It was also equipped with a whole assortment of machinery designed to enhance spectacle.⁸⁵ Although this kind of theatre building appeared sporadically in the Greek world from the fourth century onwards and soon became the Panhellenic standard, it is hotly debated whether it was already present in Menander’s Athens. The evidence, scant as it may be, seems to tilt in favour of the doubters, who argue that it was not until the second, and possibly even the first century BC, that Athens followed suit.⁸⁶ If the advent of this proscenium theatre was indeed so late, this would be one further strong indication of how obstinately Athens clung to tradition amidst a rapidly altering theatrical (and political) universe.

A new performance medium: standardisation, hybridity, referentiality

We should bear in mind the possibility of such Athenian hesitancy, because (to adapt a chemistry term) the ‘amphoteric’

⁸³ Cf. Bosher (2012), who looks at theatre outside Athens for the most part in the Greek West of the classical period.

⁸⁴ Wiles (1991: 36).

⁸⁵ On the use of such machinery in the fourth century, see Pöhlmann (1995).

⁸⁶ See, for instance, Pickard-Cambridge (1946: 134ff); Bieber (c.1961: 108ff); Townsend (1986); Polacco (1990); Moretti (2001); Gogos (2008: 69ff). In support of the idea that the Theatre of Lycurgus had a raised stage are Winter (1983); Wiles (1991: 38).

(backward- and forward-looking) climate in which Menander's theatre grew accounts for a great deal of its peculiarities. Menander's career (321–292 BC) lies at a junction. He looks both back at classical antecedents and forward to Hellenistic follow-ups. The elaborate nature of his performance text prefigures developments one can comfortably call 'Hellenistic'. Nevertheless, we should not forget that if the 'Hellenistic' was simply intimated, and can only be verified in retrospect, the presence of the classical was still very physical.

Old and new tendencies converge in Menander. Menander's comedies, inasmuch as they premiered or were re-performed both in and out of Athens, must have been produced in both the old and the new type of theatre. The new system of masks, to name another example, had already taken a distinct shape, but it was clearly novel and perhaps still fictile. Alongside many 'New Type' masks one could find a fair number of the 'Old Type', deriving from the period of Middle Comedy.⁸⁷ The boundaries between 'Middle' and 'New' Comedy, after all, are not only porous as literary-historical categories, being conventional and heuristic, always are, but substantially so. Such trademarks of Middle Comedy as *onomasti kōmōidein* or topical references persisted, to a certain extent, in New Comedy as well. The same happened with plot types and stock characters, such as the cook, the parasite, the soldier, the *servus callidus* ('wily slave'), etc., which never ceased to be popular, although their dramatic 'genome' had already been mapped out completely before the advent of Menander and his

⁸⁷ On the issue of 'Old' and 'New' style masks in Menander, cf. J. R. Green (1994: 99–100): 'The masks associated with New Comedy fell into two largely distinct stylistic series: the so-called Old Style and New Style. As the names imply, Old Style masks are developed out of the traditional types of Middle Comedy . . . and although somewhat softer in style than their predecessors and more naturalistic, by contrast with New Style masks they appear fairly strong-featured and conventional. It is noteworthy that they do not have as full a range of young women as New Style. They modify existing types and, not surprisingly perhaps, the types most reproduced in this series are those of the old men and slaves. They are masks full of vigour and character. New Style masks on the other hand are a stylistically close-knit series that gives every appearance of being invented by a single individual. They are characterised by much fuller and softer modelling of face and hair, and in appropriate cases even have bags under the eyes. They are far more naturalistic and sit well with the ancient view that Menander wrote naturalistic Comedy.'

coevals.⁸⁸ It is precisely the way Menander juggles the constituents of his genre that amounts to the ‘Hellenistic’ character of his performance, and that renders a purely synchronic approach to his theatre potentially reductive.

The formulation of a new performance medium by the time of Menander was predicated on two simultaneous and interlocking processes: standardisation and semiotisation. Starting with the former, these two processes will be the focus of the two following sections. Practical constraints do not allow us to discuss the complete arsenal of New Comedy signs in this chapter. We shall confine ourselves to the two semiotic systems, space and the mask, which most clearly evince the hybridity we postulated for the genre and the semantic significance thereof.

Space and the mask are arguably the two material sign systems most foregrounded in the genre of Menander (the actor, of course, is always at the apex, the link between and the animator of them all).⁸⁹ I suggest two reasons for this foregrounding. The first is functional. In a genre that revolves around relationships and the issue of status, spatial arrangements physicalise the tensions of the play. As regards the mask, in the kind of comedy that centres on the progression from *ēthos*, that is, moral predisposition, to *prohairesis*, moral choice, and finally to *praxis*, action (see further in Chapter 3), it is natural to focus on the sign carrying the greatest number of ethical clues and creating the greatest number of tensions between image and words, words and action, generic expectation and manifested behaviour, etc. The second reason is the dynamic referentiality of space and the mask, which emanates from the visible allusions they perform, either to tragedy or to other significant areas of reference. Whether non-verbal signs possess the ability ‘to refer to anything’ used to be a controversial issue;⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Our understanding of Middle Comedy has deepened thanks to Webster (1970); Hunter (1983); Nesselrath (1990); Arnott (1996a); Konstantakos (2000). See also Papachrysostomou (2008).

⁸⁹ On the notions of ‘foregrounding’ and ‘semiotic hierarchy’ in performance, see Elam (1980: 11ff.), with references to the fundamental works of the Prague theorists (Mukarovský, Veltruský, etc.).

⁹⁰ Cf. Issacharoff (1981) with the rebuttal of Edmunds (1992).

however, few scholars doubt nowadays that this under-valuation of the non-verbal is unacceptable, and that non-verbal signs are connotative as much as they are denotative; that they, too, are repositories of theatrical memory and hence potential markers of allusion.

We shall begin this discussion by referring to the standardisation of Menander's performance medium and the semantic dynamism it generated. By 'standardisation' we refer to the process whereby New Comedy, via the intermediary Middle Comedy, crystallised standard systems of signs including: structured parameters of plot, with defined actants and conventional resolutions;⁹¹ stock character types, associated with typical costumes;⁹² premises of acting (movements etc.),⁹³ and to a certain extent even a type-specific type of language;⁹⁴ specific genera of masks; a new arrangement of space (theatrical, stage or dramatic space);⁹⁵ a steady number of no more than three actors;⁹⁶ and the marginalisation of the chorus. In most of these cases, standardisation was effected through (or caused by) a gradual shift

⁹¹ On the New Comedy plot, see the structuralist analyses in Wiles (1991: 26ff.) and mostly Lowe (2000). See also Webster (1973).

⁹² On New Comedy costume, see Wiles (1991: 188–208).

⁹³ On acting in the fourth century, see Hughes (1991); Neiiendam (1992: 63–93); J. R. Green (1997), (2002); Csapo (2002); Handley (2002a).

⁹⁴ See, for instance, Brenk (1987) on the language of young men; Silk (1995) and Grasso (1997) on old men; Sommerstein (1995) on women; and Krieter-Spiro (1997: 201–53) on the 'Dienstpersonnel'. The classic reference for sociolinguistics in Greek literature from Homer to Lucian is Dickey (1996).

⁹⁵ Categories as distinguished by Issacharoff (1981). 'Theatrical space' refers to the architectural design; 'stage space', to the arrangement of the *skēnē*-building; and 'dramatic space' to spaces created in and by the fictional world of the play, in which case it is subdivided into 'mimetic space' (space visible to the audience, otherwise termed scenic space) and 'diegetic space' (space immediately offstage). Edmunds (1992: 223) refines Issacharoff's 'diegetic space', subdividing it into space represented as 'visible to the characters on stage but not to the spectators' (otherwise termed 'extrascenic space') and 'space invisible to both the characters on stage and the spectators' (otherwise termed 'distanced space'). For a useful compendium of modern narratological theory on space, see I. de Jong's introduction in de Jong (2012: 1–18). Important earlier bibliography includes Wiles (1997); Rehm (2002); Revermann (2006: 107–44). For theatrical and performance space especially, good starting points are McAuley (1999) and Wiles (2003). For Greek drama, see the special chapters on Aeschylus and Sophocles (R. Rehm), Euripides (M. Lloyd) and Aristophanes (A. Bowie) in de Jong (2012).

⁹⁶ On the three-actor rule in Menander, see Rees (1910a), (1910b); Hourmouziades (1973); Sandbach (1975).

from the relative semiotic fluidity of Aristophanes⁹⁷ towards the practices of tragedy: standardisation ran parallel with hybridisation. What must be emphasised is the allusive potential that resulted from standardisation, exactly because the latter was largely the end-product of intergeneric osmosis. Let us turn our attention to space.

1. *The case of space*

The structures New Comedy has come to share with tragedy through a long process of cross-pollination have indeed created, for New Comedy, a hybrid world where the boundaries between the urban and the mythical can be diaphanous. To miss this would be to reduce New Comedy to a uni-dimensional cardboard of its true self. Tragic intertextuality is especially expedient in the purview of the discussion of space, too, perhaps of space especially, since this is, arguably, the one single semiotic category in which New Comedy's shift towards tragic practice is most explicit.

In his recent discussion of Aristophanic space, Nick Lowe juxtaposed the practices of Old Comedy and fifth-century tragedy.⁹⁸ Quoting and adapting Lowe's diagram we can set New Comedy's position as in [Table 2.1](#).

Irrespective of the archaeological uncertainties mentioned above with regard to the Theatre of Lycurgus, it is clear that spatial conventions in Menander have converged with those of post-classical tragedy with the exception of machinery, which in New Comedy is more sparingly used. New Comedy's recognisable urban milieu, for example, occasionally allows a playwright, such as Menander in the *Dyskolos*, to relish in minute topographical detail and naturalistically to map out on- and off-stage

⁹⁷ Lowe (2006) recently challenged this perception of fluidity, in a palinode to previous positions of his (Lowe 1987, 1988). Lowe aims to show that: (a) space is still 'an important shaper of narrative and theme in Aristophanes as it is in tragedy'; and (b) that 'for the most part [the uses of space in Aristophanes and tragedy] are far more similar than they are different'. Lowe is vindicated fully as regards the first goal. The second is rather overstated.

⁹⁸ Lowe (2006: 63).

New performance

Table 2.1

Old Comedy	Tragedy	New Comedy
Scene changes permitted, but rare and overwhelmingly confined to prologue	Scene changes (almost) prohibited	<i>Adopts tragic model</i>
Identity of <i>skēnē</i> flexible and sometimes anonymous	Identity of <i>skēnē</i> constant (except in the rare occasion of scene change)	<i>Adopts tragic model</i> <i>Skēnē</i> representing mostly urban surroundings (streets and houses in the Athenian <i>asty</i> , in Attike demes or in other cities); only exceptionally non-urban ^a
Location established in prologue or <i>parodos</i>	Location established in prologue	<i>Adopts tragic model</i> Locations often very specific and naturalistic
<i>Eisodoi</i> access terrestrial or supernal/infernal offstage spaces	<i>Eisodoi</i> access terrestrial offstage spaces	<i>Adopts tragic model</i> Occasionally close attention to topographical detail
<i>Eisodoi</i> not clearly distinguished	<i>Eisodoi</i> identified with opposite offstage locations	<i>Adopts tragic model</i> Intricate plotting of offstage time-space. Identification of <i>parodoi</i> with city/country is non-universal. Apparently common use of <i>periaktoi</i> and <i>skēnai</i> (representational scenery)
Machinery more casually used	Machinery used with restraint	<i>Adopts Classical tragic model</i> Use of <i>ekkyklēma</i> perhaps quite common; of <i>mēchanē</i> , exceptional. Use of machinery in contemporary tragedy much more extensive
Sometimes more than one door (?)	One door only (?)	<i>Akin to fourth-century tragic model</i> ^b Three-door system; though central door is on occasion unassigned and unlocalised. Exit and entrance motifs elaborated ^c

Table 2.1 (*cont.*)

Old Comedy	Tragedy	New Comedy
Location and ownership of door can be uncoupled	Location and ownership of door intertwined	<i>Adopts tragic model</i> Side doors opposed and symbolically over-determined
Door/orchestra refocusing persists	Door/orchestra refocusing resisted	<i>Adopts fourth-century tragic model</i> Gradually abandons orchestra as performance space for actors

^a As, for instance, in Menander's *Leukadia* or Plautus' *Rudens* (based on a Diphilus original). Even country settings are residential in nature, as with Phyle in *Dyskolos*.

^b According to some ancient testimonies, perhaps not to be taken for granted as stating an unbreakable rule, in tragedy the central door is the domain of the protagonist, whereas the right door houses the *deuteronistēs*. Pollux 4.124 suggests that contrary to the practices of comedy in tragedy the left door was oftentimes underused or unassigned.

^c Cf. Frost (1988).

locales.⁹⁹ The handling of time is correspondingly intricate, as the plot usually unfolds within a time-scale of a single day.¹⁰⁰ Attention is given to time markers; and 'empty stages' (instances where no actor occupies the stage) or act intervals (with their choral interludes) are used to simulate, albeit less strictly and realistically, the passage of off-stage time.¹⁰¹ Time before and time after the play is occasionally charted very clearly as well.

However, the largest cache of symbolism as regards Menandrian space lies in the doors and the way they are placed on the left–right axes, as well as in the focal centre of the *skēnē*. Doors in Menander are 'indexes' (or metonymies) of households and often even 'symbols' of individual characters (like Knemon).¹⁰² Symbolic antithesis, sometimes symmetrical, between the doors

⁹⁹ Full discussion in Lowe (1987). Good points are also made by G. Hoffmann (1986).

¹⁰⁰ Cf. the metatheatrical joke in *Dysk.* 187–8: 'much could happen in a single day' (πᾶλλ' ἐν ἡμέρᾳ μίᾳ ἢ γένοιτ' ἄν). There is only one known exception, Terence's *Heautontimorumenos*, which extends overnight.

¹⁰¹ On the time-scale of Menander's plays, see Arnott (1987). ¹⁰² See Traill (2001).

(one household being the mirror image of the other) must have been visually observable in relevant plays with the use of *periaktoi* and *skēnai* (stage-level panels representing scenery).¹⁰³ Such painted tableaux connect the doors also with their corresponding offstage, distanced spaces. Spatial symbolisms, especially the contrast between the doors, help the moral and political stakes of the plot to materialise theatrically. This degree of sophistication gives every appearance of being new, although this is beyond definitive proof.

Parallelisms between tragedy and comedy in terms of the symbolic use of space become visually starker as the two theatrical genres now share not the flexible wooden building of the fifth century, but the new, stone *skēnē* with its permanent arrangement: as convergence in spatial conventions is presented on a physical space that remains practically unchanged in its outlook, the use of space, too, can become a vehicle of allusion. Let us take the central door, for instance. Its scale is plainly non-domestic: as such it is perfectly at home in tragedy, where it represents a palace door or some other monumental building, but in comedy it stands out. Hence, it is either exploited as a shrine of sorts or as a topographically unspecified but focal medial point between the two opposing households. The significance of this medial location as a locus of reconciliation is major and has been duly noted.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, this cannot exhaust its theatrical utility. The monumental central door of New Comedy is inevitably reminiscent of its larger-than-(urban)-life parallel usage in tragedy. The following example shows how Menander can draw metatheatrical attention to this fact. In *Sikyonioi*, Act IV, Eleusinos, a kind of tragic messenger, calls Smikrines¹⁰⁵ to hold by the door. This door, however, if the supplement to the line is correct (at least the first word undoubtedly is),¹⁰⁶ is not a simple *thyra*, but a high-flown, tragicomic *parastades domōn*, ‘the pilasters of the house’ like those found in temples or palaces – exactly the kind of building

¹⁰³ On representational scenery in New Comedy, see Wiles (1991: 41–3).

¹⁰⁴ Wiles (1991: 46).

¹⁰⁵ Belardinelli (1994: 154–6) argues instead that Eleusinos’ interlocutor is Malthake.

¹⁰⁶ Supplemented cogently by Handley and Webster. Cf. Gomme and Sandbach (1973: 650 *ad loc.*).

that this same *skēnē* door represents in tragedy.¹⁰⁷ In a scene that resonates with tragic language in general, and with allusions to Euripides' *Orestes* in particular, the door is also transformed linguistically into its tragic equivalent, and this transformation is facilitated by the fact that architecturally speaking the structure is the same.

The focus of comedy may indeed fall on the left–right axis,¹⁰⁸ but it is often the central door that serves as an indicator that New Comedy space, too, is stratified. Much like the plot, space, too, enjoys a twofold level of existence: urban and mythical, contextual and intertextual. This is more evident in the cases where the door is firmly localised, for example, in the *Dyskolos*. Localisation creates associations, and these associations can sometimes be shown to evoke (tragic) intertexts. A 'real-life' grotto of Pan in Phyle cannot easily be dissociated from the analogous mythical grottoes, where so much happened in so many tragedies, whose *mythoi* are paradigms of the comic plot (for instance, in Euripides' *Ion*). Inasmuch as space, too, can energise associations with mythological (i.e., tragic) paradigms, it projects itself to the level of the mythical. Space also can be referential. Since New Comedy plots tend to tread on narrative archetypes, the space in which they unfold is, as it were, pre-occupied, pre-inhabited as well.

To illustrate the symbolic use of space in Menander and to confirm that standardisation of space went hand-in-hand with hybridisation, a fact which created allusive potential, let us look at the spatial arrangement of the *Dyskolos*. We shall start with a bird's-eye view of the play's space and then proceed to the analysis of one particular scene from the point of view of space and intertextuality.

Although the play is structured largely along the opposition of city and country, the 'city', represented in the play by the family of Kallippides, is not signified in the scenic, but only in the distanced space. The scenic space represents the houses of

¹⁰⁷ ὦ γεραῖέ, μένον ἐν παραστάσιν δόμων (Sik. 169ff). Compare Iphigenia's similar request in Eur. IT 1159–60: ἀναξ, ἔχ' αὐτοῦ σὸν πόδ' ἐν παραστάσιν.

¹⁰⁸ Wiles (1991: 45).

Knemon (stage-left) and Gorgias (stage-right). Despite their urban outlook, however, these houses are clearly not 'city'. They are on the limits of Attike, in the deme of Phyle on the slopes of Parnes. Between them, medial in location and liminal in cultural baggage,¹⁰⁹ lies a locus that by definition sits uncomfortably in civic environments: the cave of Pan and the Nymphs, monumental and imposing, as it is indexed by the central door of the stone *skēnē*. There are two important extrascenic locations, the first accessed through the doors of Pan's cave (the spring where Sostratos draws water for Knemon's daughter), the second through the door of Knemon (the well where Knemon falls). The distanced space represents Knemon's fields on stage-left and Kallippides' house on stage-right.

This overall spatial arrangement of the *Dyskolos*, two urban locations separated by a place of cult (in other plays the buffer is unspecified), evinces the standardisation New Comedy space has undergone. More importantly, however, this standardised space is also symbolically structured. It is characteristic of many New Comedy performances, of *Dyskolos* in particular, that all spaces in the play, scenic, extrascenic and distanced, are polarised; that is, they set up significant binary oppositions. These binaries go far deeper than the city/country theme.

The polarisation of the extrascenic space, not the most obvious one, involves two singularly symbolic places: two dark entrances into the depths of the earth, one a human construction (a well), another, a natural creation (a cave). Correspondingly, it also involves two sources of water, which play a significant part in the plot (water being a common mythical symbol of transition and liminality, both central elements in New Comedy narratives). On the one hand, we have the supposedly 'tame' *qua* civic water source in Knemon's house, which, however, will end up swallowing first Knemon's bucket and then his body, and which will not help Sostratos' case to win the girl, if only indirectly, because of Gorgias' gallantry. On the other hand, there is the theoretically precarious, mythically and ritually burdened spring of the

¹⁰⁹ On Pan, his cultural associations and his cult the classic reference is Borgeaud (1988).

Nymphs,¹¹⁰ which has already secured a happy resolution for the girl because of the rites she had been piously performing there (*Dysk.* 36–9). This supposedly ‘centrifugal’ location will become the epicentre of revelry for the integrated comic universe in the end. In other words, the ‘civic’ and the ‘wild’ extrascenic locations, the well and the cave, reverse their expected roles in the plot, the first being only incidentally productive, the second proving to be mercifully beneficent.

The polarisation between the two distanced-space locations is more palpable. Knemon’s fields are accessed from stage-left passing by Knemon’s door, whereas Kallippides’ house is accessed from stage-right passing by Gorgias’ door. Although the physical separation between the two distanced-space locations is not envisaged as being too far, their symbolic distance is supposed to be seen as unsurpassable, not to be traversed either by Knemon, who cannot reach the city, or by Sostratos, for whom to intrude into Knemon’s turf would spell doom (we have already argued in [Chapter 1](#) how this spatial symbolism is accentuated by an oblique, comical reference to a similar fateful venture, that of Pentheus in Euripides’ *Bacchae*).

The scenic space of the *Dyskolos*, which represents Knemon’s house on the left and Gorgias’ house on the right, is thus framed by two extremes: the ‘wild’ country of Knemon and the ‘civilised’ city of Kallippides. Knemon’s house verges towards the former extreme, Gorgias’ house towards the latter. The function of this arrangement is clearly ‘characterising’,¹¹¹ but not as schematically as one might think: Knemon lies closer to wild nature, and Gorgias closer to civil (and civic) culture, but Gorgias’ location, as mentioned, is still ‘country’, that is, closer to Knemon than to Sostratos. From a different, now spatial, perspective Menander corroborates the suspicion that just as the position of Gorgias’ house is liminal, oscillating between city and country, Gorgias himself could become either a Sostratos or a Knemon.

This is where Pan comes in. If Knemon’s house is the scenic location where much of the physical action takes place, and which

¹¹⁰ On Greek beliefs about Nymphs and nympholepsy, see Connor (1988); Larson (2001).

¹¹¹ de Jong (2012: 16).

becomes the mirror of Knemon himself, the cave of Pan is the catalyst which inevitably mythicises and intertextualises the otherwise realistic spatial façade. At the very core of the realistic-looking scenic space of the *Dyskolos* Menander positions a locus, which inevitably infuses mythical elements into the setting. Already the anti-realistic appearance of Pan – a personal deity, not an abstraction, with a shrine only a few hundred metres away from the Theatre of Dionysus, on the northern slope of the Acropolis – effects, as mentioned in [Chapter 1](#), the ‘transduction’ of Menander’s ‘universal’ Phyle into a space where the ritual and the textual baggage carried by Pan and the Nymphs cannot but play a role. Pan is the epitome of liminality, and his cave, a wild enclosure but also a place of propitiatory ritual (of the sort that Sostratos’ mother has come to perform), is the spatial manifestation of this liminality. By virtue of his mythical identity and ritual function Pan can be both a torrent of illicit sexuality and a cohesive force integrating the comic universe. In other words, Pan’s cave, which stands in the middle and dominates the *skēnē*, can verge symbolically either to stage-left (bestiality, and by extension the potential rape of Knemon’s daughter, who wanders unprotected in the realms where hungry males are hunting, as Daos mordantly underlines); or to stage-right (towards a civically sanctioned *oikos*).

Above all, however, Pan’s cave is the setting of various tragic narratives, now performed on that same stage as the *Dyskolos* in the new Theatre of Lycurgus. The scene in which the play takes the most advantage of this intertextual capacity of theatrical space is *Dyskolos*, Act I, lines 189ff. Knemon’s daughter, distraught and terrified, comes out carrying a water jug and prepares to enter Pan’s cave to fetch water for her cantankerous father. Sostratos meets her at the entrance of the Nymphaion and offers to relieve her of the task. The scene, ‘whose strict metre and elevated language are vividly tragic’,¹¹² has caused scholars, with good reason, to suspect allusion to Euripides’ *Electra*, 54ff., where the Atreid princess is met by the farmer on her way to fetch water

¹¹² Frost (1988: 44).

from a well.¹¹³ It can be demonstrated that the markers of intertextuality in this scene are no less spatial than textual, and that the referentiality of space renders the intertextual game much more intricate. There is a lot more to the theatrical texture of the scene than has been acknowledged.

Common plotting (dramatic purpose), but also a comparable set of movements on the part of the actors (kinesics), plus the stark image of the female protagonists being impoverished unduly and unfairly, mark the initial bond between the *Dyskolos* and the *Electra* scenes. In Euripides' play, Electra, herself visibly distraught (her hair is shorn in mourning), carrying a jug and looking like a peasant girl or a slave (*El.* 104), heads towards the river, supposedly to fetch water for her household's needs (*El.* 71–6), but really in order to expose the fact that her reduced station constitutes an act of hubris on Aegisthus' part (*El.* 57–8). Although it is not in the girl's nature to complain, quite the opposite, Knemon's daughter, too, as Daos' severe censure shows (*Dysk.* 218ff.), is dangerously neglected. Electra, like Knemon's daughter, is soon joined on her way to the river by a man, in her case the husband Aegisthus has forced upon her: a common farmer (*autourgos*), who has nevertheless behaved nobly, respecting her virginity and royal status. The farmer offers to take Electra's place, since the task is beneath a princess (*El.* 64–6). Comparably, Sostratos (who later will pretend to be a man of the country), minds the girl's dignity by offering to relieve her from the embarrassment of showing herself to possible sacrificers inside (*Dysk.* 197–200). In the eyes of Sostratos, Knemon's daughter, like Electra, is a contradiction: both Electra and Knemon's daughter display an elusive divide between outside appearance (*schēma*) and *tropos*: Electra is a fallen princess who has been reduced to a peasant's life; reversely, Knemon's daughter is a rustic girl with a noble aura her (ἄγροικος . . . ἐλευθερίως γε πῶς, *Dysk.* 200). This divide between the girl's character and her way of life has already

¹¹³ Handley (1965: 164); Katsouris (1975a: 120ff). Handley (2002b) casts a wider glance on the motif of fetching water from springs, with emphasis on the scene in Plautus' *Rudens*.

been specified as the ambiguous and unpredictable result of the way she was raised ('she has grown up to be what her upbringing made her: she knows no evil', γέγονεν ὁμοία τῇ τροφῇ τις, οὐδὲ ἐν ἰεῖδυῖα φλαῦρον, *Dysk.* 35–6), a comic paradox if ever there was one in the play: the kind of secluded life away from human contact that condemns Knemon, and that almost destroys his daughter's future, ends up safeguarding that future by making her the darling of the Nymphs.

In both scenes the consequential space is lying offstage; only Menander has turned Euripides' distanced space into extrascenic, that is, something more immediate and more closely associated with the central door and its holders. The alteration is momentous. Menander's scene, as expected, performs a number of reversals with reference to the Euripidean: in fact, Menander has 'reshuffled' the *Electra* roles in such a way as to turn Euripides on his head. Scholars sceptical of allusion at this point usually note that the *autourgos* corresponds to the rustic Gorgias, not Sostratos. But this is missing precisely the point of Menander's comic twist. When the Daughter makes an Electra-like entrance, the audience expects a mirror of Euripides' character. Ironically, it is not Gorgias, but Sostratos, a pampered urban fop, who comes forth. In a brilliant comic twist, the hardy farmer of Euripides has become a city cockscomb. Likewise, Knemon's daughter has turned the tables on Electra. The Daughter's dire need is absent in the self-demeaning, defiant princess. If Electra's complaints constitute a form of protest, the Daughter's moans are a gesture of weakness and despair. Contrast Electra's adamant refusal to accept help with the daughter's almost unseemly eagerness; Electra's 'sexual prurience'¹¹⁴ with the daughter's purity and naiveté: in Menander, the steely, resolute royal in a peasant's attire has become a genuinely helpless, frail countrywoman.

The crucial interpretive key, however, is this: Menander has reversed the status and thus the balance of power between the male and the female characters in the two plays. The social gap, which favoured the female and ensured her chastity in Euripides,

¹¹⁴ Rehm (2002) 194.

has now been overturned to the advantage of the male. Space is of the essence in stamping out the meaning here. We cannot know what spatial adjustments, if any, would have to be made if Euripides' *Electra* were to be restaged in the three-door Theatre of Lycurgus. Would *Electra* still enter from the central door, as in the fifth-century play (where only one door must have been used in tragic plays)? And what would that door look like? In the fourth century, an entrance from a monumental central door would be a stark incongruity, of the sort that *Electra* herself incarnates in this play. In any case, *Electra*'s 'double' in the *Dyskolos* has undoubtedly been relegated to the margins (stage-left). The *Dyskolos* audience also cannot be oblivious to the fact that in terms of role distribution, *Electra* belongs firmly to Euripides' protagonist, but Knemon's Daughter is most probably the leftovers of the tritagonist.

This simple shift of power from the female to the male is enough to create an aura of 'danger' in the *Dyskolos* scene. This is not unrelated, as suggested before, to the symbolism of water and its common magical associations with precarious (sexual) encounters. This symbolism is reinforced in the *Dyskolos* by the vital spatial change of substituting Euripides' distant, absent river with the commanding, charged presence of the grotto of Pan. This crucial change of setting is yet another visual reminder that Pan's symbolic leverage in the *Dyskolos* is never to be underrated.

Now, and this is important, from the intertextual point of view, substituting *Electra*'s river with Pan's grotto can be seen as a gesture of 'contamination' with reference to the *Electra* model, as the grotto carries its own distinct allusiveness into Menander's theatrical landscape. The allusive voice in the background is crossed with a second voice, drawn from stories other than the *Electra*, thus 'triangulating' the theatricality of the scene. To specify, the grotto of Pan is playing a part in one of Athens' great foundational myths dramatised by Euripides in his *Ion*. In the *Ion*, Pan's grotto was the centrepiece in a story of the sort that fourth-century comedy enthusiastically takes up: of violence turned blessing, but not before a few agonising moments of balancing dangerously on the verge of total catastrophe. In the *Ion*, Pan's grotto was the stage of a characteristically Pan-ic feat, the rape of a

powerless mortal (not unlike Knemon's daughter in that respect, for all her necessary mythical royalty) by an all-consuming god. It should be clear how Menander 'contaminates' the *Electra* intertext with his cunning employment of status reversal and stage-setting. Menander's reversal of the status balance in favour of Sostratos, and the danger this notionally creates for Knemon's Daughter, pertains clearly to the dynamics of the *Ion*, not the *Electra*. At the same time, what in the *Ion* was a feature of distanced space (and of the past) – the grotto of Pan does not feature on stage in Euripides' *Ion* – is here transformed into the focal point of Menander's performance: it becomes imminently present. Nothing vindicates more fully the referentiality of Menander's space than this presence.

Two intertexts, two contrasting dynamics of character interaction: the way Menander has re-mastered the *Electra* has produced, by way of 'contamination', not one, but two models of action. Barrett's supplement τὶ δρῶ in 194,¹¹⁵ an echo of the famous 'tragic question', would capture the moment of dramatic indecisiveness between an unconquerable carnal urge (*amachos*, Dysk. 193), and a simultaneous, opposite-driving awe for the girl's beauty (Dysk. 201). Sostratos' choice of adjective to describe the girl's beauty, *eleutherios* ('noble', but literally 'pertaining to a free woman') is not gratuitous: it is expressive of Sostratos' attraction to a course of action he knows is taboo. Characteristically, Sostratos' quandary is couched as a choice not simply between two moral alternatives, but also between two plays: the *Electra*, on the one hand (respecting the girl's virginity and safeguarding her marriageability), and the *Ion*, on the other (raping the girl inside the grotto of Pan). The tantrum Daos throws at the end of this scene (Dysk. 218ff.) indicates that the latter option, in a space bursting with theatrical memory, is (humorously) *not* inconceivable! The fact that the audience already know where the tide will turn in the end may give the scene a delightful light-heartedness overall, but it does not render Sostratos' subjective position, his

¹¹⁵ Sandbach's OCT (1990) prints Barigazzi's ἀνδρεῖς τέρας ('man, what a prodigy!'), an equally plausible reiteration of Sostratos' amazement in front of the girl's astounding beauty.

intertextually determined dilemma, any less real. After all, the gist of Menander's plays is hidden in the details (*ta kath' hekasta*, *Dysk.* 45); and as mentioned already in [Chapter 1](#) at the behest of Stephen Halliwell, one of the primary skills of a Menandrian spectator must be to watch the action from a dual perspective, to distance oneself momentarily from one's position of superior knowledge in order to experience the individual standpoint of the characters themselves.

Let us examine the kinesics of this scene (kinesics being another spatial category) with the Euripidean intertexts in mind. 'Playing *Electra*' would warrant spatial divergence between Sostratos and the girl: Knemon's daughter would enter the cave alone and fill the jug by herself, like *Electra*; Sostratos would either leave, as Euripides' farmer did (Sostratos was already setting off towards the city, that is, to stage-right, to find Getas, *Dysk.* 181–2), or would passively wait for her outside. 'Playing *Ion*', on the contrary, would require convergence: the Daughter would enter Pan's cave; Sostratos would follow her inside; and violence would occur. Sostratos' actual choice explores the middle ground between the aggressive activity of the *Ion* role and the hands-off passivity of the *Electra* role. *He* enters Pan's grotto, but without the girl, and *he* fills the jug. Sostratos does not contradict the fact that throughout this play he seems to be motivated by a Panic possession of sorts: it is as if the same 'automatic attraction' as in *Dysk.* 575 pulls him inside (ἐλκε]ει δέ μ' αὐτόματον τὸ πρᾶγμα εἰς τὸν τόπον). Simultaneously, however, by virtue of an opposite power, he explicitly asks the girl to wait outside, thus preventing his future bride from entering the world of extramarital sexuality. Significantly, Pan as a god emblematised this form of centrifugal sexuality (an in the *Ion*), as much as he protected (and promoted) legitimate unions, as in the *Dyskolos*.

We have every reason to believe that in terms of proxemics the final convergence of boy and girl after the filling of the jug (*Dysk.* 211) must have been off-centred. Knemon's daughter can be imagined as moving anxiously back and forth as she waits for Sostratos' return. When she hears the door creaking (*Dysk.* 204–6), she must be heading back towards her house on stage-left (this would put some distance between her and Daos, who comes

out from Gorgias' house on stage-right, ensuring the minimum semblance of realism Menander needs). It is thus most probably at mid-point between Knemon's house and Pan's grotto that Sostratos catches up with her again. This off-centred staging is semiotically powerful. It is a movement away from Pan, but still by Pan's side, beside but not inside Pan's realm. It is a convergence brought about by the sexual energy of Pan, but lying outside Pan's uncivic sexuality.

We have seen that the hybridisation of space in Menander's *Dyskolos* works in many ways. First and foremost, the monumental, tragedy-like central door representing Pan's grotto is invested with the relevant narratives of tragic myth. Furthermore, the *Dyskolos* contracts, in a way, the kinesics of two Euripidean plays, *Electra* and *Ion*, in the background: the divergence of *Electra* guaranteed perennial non-marriage (non-consummation that is). The convergence of the *Ion* would inflict 'Panic marriage' (i.e., rape), the *dystēnon* (*Ion*, 941) *pikrōn gamōn hybrin* ('the wretched outrage of a bitter marriage', *Ion*, 506) that this god knows very well how to inflict in tragic myth. In the *Dyskolos*, an initial divergence (Sostratos inside, Daughter outside) brings about a final convergence, but away from Pan (Sostratos meets the girl in front of her father's house): this safeguards the possibility of citizen marriage.

All in all, the example of this *Dyskolos* scene shows how the hybrid space of New Comedy can serve as another indicator of intertextual 'energy' on Menander's stage.

2. Standardisation and hybridisation of the mask

Nonetheless, for all the imposing presence and referentiality of space, the most polyvalent means of constructing visual (and intervisual) meaning in New Comedy performance was the mask. Pollux in Book IV of his *Onomasticon* (4.143–54) preserves a catalogue of forty-four New Comedy masks divided into five large genera (or four, if you consider Old Women as a subgenus): Old Men (Masks 1–9); Young Men (Masks 10–20); Male Slaves (Masks 21–27); Old Women (Masks 28–30); and Young Women (31–44). The latter category includes both free and slave girls,

married matrons and maidens, respectable citizen women as well *hetairai* and *pallakai*. The typology of Pollux squares well enough with the archaeological record,¹¹⁶ and seems to go back to authoritative Hellenistic sources. The catalogue constitutes a sophisticated attempt not just to list, but also to classify the material according to the most important binaries in contemporary Greek ethics: free/slave, young/old, man/woman, citizen/non-citizen.

The catalogue as we have it presents difficulties. It is only the epitome of a larger work, now lost. The information provided in the catalogue is not altogether coherent and systematic for all mask types alike (the same kind of data is not provided every time in the same level of detail or with the same logic or method). We cannot be certain whether Pollux's catalogue comes from a source that recorded and indexed the repertory of one particular troupe, or if it is universal; and if it is universal, whether he exhausts the masks available to the playwrights of the time. In fact, we cannot be sure whether the contrary is what applies, that the masks Pollux lists were not in use simultaneously, but include relics of Middle Comedy and/or masks that went in and out of fashion from playwright to playwright, from troupe to troupe or even from place to place. The uncertainties are numerous, but still Pollux's catalogue constitutes the most detailed source at our disposal, the one that comes closest to the original time of Menander's performances, and its importance should not be summarily dismissed.

We have already mentioned the value of *MINC*³ and some earlier studies for the correlation of Pollux's catalogue with the terracotta and other kinds of representations of masks. When it comes to a semiotic analysis of the system of Menander's signs, and especially his masks, the most important work we have had at our disposal so far is Wiles (1991). Although some of his interpretations are open to criticism, David Wiles deserves credit for impressing upon Menandrian scholars the irreducible value of *opsis*, and indeed of the mask. Wiles insists on the mask as a

¹¹⁶ See at the beginning of this chapter.

unified system, which is supposed to be read syntagmatically and synchronically, by way of significant differentials.¹¹⁷ The masks, he argues, play off each other on stage and often are better ‘read’ not in isolation, but in contrasting pairs (see my response to this argument in [Chapter 4](#)).

What follows in this book is meant as an illustration, a supplementation and, at points, as a critical readjustment of Wiles’ argument. My most important objection to his generally cogent approach should be evident from the argument so far: to understand New Comedy, hence its mask, fully, I contend, one must reckon with the historical process that determined its making, and especially to take into account the allusive aptitude of its hybridity. In other words, we need a more flexible theoretical framework, which will take into account Menander’s erudite praxis of ‘thickening the plot’ by cross-referencing the performance text with other frames of reference, generated either at the moment of playwriting or, perhaps chiefly so, of spectating. A merely synchronic analysis does not do full justice to the rich texture of Menander’s performances, where a sophisticated poetics of fictionality and (inter)textuality collaborate to produce an end-product whose depth reaches far below the realistic surface. The over-determined nature of Menander’s mask, which carries into the performance both its comic ancestry and in many cases its hybridity (as a result of the iconographic communication between the tragic and the comic mask systems) is part and parcel of the genre’s discourse and of the mask’s own semiosis in the real-time of the theatrical event. The mask shows eloquently how the processes of standardisation, hybridisation and semiotisation converge. We can only overlook to the detriment of our historical and semiotic analysis the resulting multilayered-ness of the New Comedy *prosōpon*.

To understand the making of Menander’s mask, we need to reckon with two processes, launched more or less simultaneously by the end of the fifth century: (a) the move from the diverse,

¹¹⁷ Wiles (1991: 188–208).

relatively labile mask system of Old Comedy, which rested on a small number of loosely defined types and a host of more or less *hapax* masks, to the crystallisation of the aforementioned forty-four or so specific masks; and (b) the evolution from the ‘neutral’ or ‘ambiguous’ mask of fifth-century tragedy,¹¹⁸ a minimalist face with a small number of standard forms, to the typed ‘expressive’ mask, which prevailed from the fourth century onwards and was distinguished by its conspicuous manifestation of *πάθος* as well as of *ἔθος*.¹¹⁹ It is this ‘inward’, semiotised mask that we encounter in Menander. Let us discuss these developments in turn.

Old Comedy masks were grotesque caricatures,¹²⁰ perhaps even ‘portraits’, of the real-life individuals debunked in the play.¹²¹ Typification was already underway at the end of the fifth century, as shown by the famous New York group of terracotta figurines (from the Athenian agora, dating around 400 BC).¹²² The mask types on these figurines expose the overlap between the mythological spoof and the domestic comedy of intrigue, which is so crucial for understanding the making of Menander’s mask.¹²³ The standardisation of the comic mask system in the course of the fourth century must somehow be related to comedy’s attempt to transcend the episodic character of the Old Comic mode, to tell a continuous story deploying a limited repertory of actantial roles and following plotting requirements as encoded in Aristotle’s

¹¹⁸ On the ‘neutral’ or ‘ambiguous’ mask of classical tragedy, cf. Wiles (2000: 148–9); Meineck (2011); Petrides (2013).

¹¹⁹ Marshall (1999) posited some standardisation in fifth-century tragic masks. Marshall arrives at six basic mask types: Old Man, Mature Man, Young Man (all of whom have dark faces and are distinguished by their beards – the young man has none); and Old Woman, Mature Woman, Young Woman, all of whom have pale complexions and are differentiated by their hair. Marshall’s categories, of course, are genera rather than types proper. On the twenty-eight mask types of post-Classical tragedy and the *ekskeua prosōpa* (specially made masks of various gods, abstractions, etc.), see Pollux 4.133–42.

¹²⁰ Pollux 4.143; Σ^v on Ar. *Nu.* 146; Ael. *VH.* 2.13; Platonius *Diff. Com.* ll. 69–81 Perusino, etc.

¹²¹ The historicity of the ‘portrait-mask’ is problematic: see Dover (1967).

¹²² See Webster (1960: 266–8); J. R. Green (1994: 34–7, 65–7). On the poetics of the Old Comedy mask, see Wiles (2008), with discussion of Webster’s and Green’s attempts at taxonomy. See also Varakis (2010).

¹²³ On the masks of Middle Comedy, see *MIMC*³, 13–28. The possible lines of evolution between Middle Comedy and New Comedy masks are summarised for each particular type in *MINC*³, vol. 1, 9–51.

Poetics. Such transcendence, as we mentioned above, was achieved either by extending the scope of tragic parody to the level of whole plots (as prefigured by Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazousae*, for instance, which lampoons various Euripidean plays, but mostly *Helen* and *Andromeda*, in a story with narrative coherence). It was also achieved, alternatively, by privileging an 'alternative' branch of comedy, apparently flourishing already in the fifth century, a comedy of *logoi* and *mythoi* (Arist. *Poet.* 1449b7–9) associated with Aristophanes' contemporary, Crates. Cratinus' *Dionysalexandros* is an example. The papyrus hypothesis (P. Oxy 663) offers glimpses of a continuous narrative structure, a *mythos*, which disguises, very thinly, topical political discourse with allusive mythological parody. The presence of a chorus of *satyrs* and a number of other motifs linked to satyr play reinforce a definite sense of generic hybridity.¹²⁴ Above all, *Dionysalexandros* already displays the standard recipe of *tragico-moedia*, a comedy in which characters of *tragic* grandeur, "*reges . . . et di*" (Plaut. *Amph.* 61), performed ridiculous antics and donned comic, perhaps grotesque, masks and indecent costumes.

I think it is reasonable enough to assume that such novel requirements of plotting demanded analogous readjustments on the level of *opsis*. The scarcity of evidence does not allow one to pinpoint straightforward continuities or specific formative exchanges between the tragic (or the satyric) and the comic mask systems. The particulars ought to remain speculative; but in some cases we can at least see the results on display. In the case of youths and maidens, an idealised face became the staple of comic lovers, to the effect, for instance, that, save the *onkos* (the lamda-shaped extension over the head that distinguishes post-classical tragic masks), comic and tragic masks of young men soon became practically indistinguishable: in iconographic terms at least, the difference between tragic and comic youth masks soon became, in most cases, quantitative, a matter of observing the presence or absence of *onkos*. In more extreme cases, identification rests on

¹²⁴ On *Dionysalexandros*, especially the play's interaction with satyr play, see Bakola (2010: 81–117).

the archaeological context and confusion is not infrequent. To gauge the effect on stage of such visual contiguity between tragic and comic masks, we can remind ourselves here of the example that opened this chapter: a comic mask reminiscent of the tragic *κούριμος παρθένος* ushers in a whole nexus of paradigmatic theatrical moments; it becomes ‘intervisual’. As a matter of course, the historical process that makes the mask also makes (part of) its theatrical function.

In other cases, satyr play, too, seems to have informed comic masks to the effect that comic and satyric iconographies well-nigh merge. Enough has been written already about the possible satyric aspects of the comic slave.¹²⁵ Another notable case not often brought to bear on relevant discussions is the mask of the *pornoboskos*. Plautus’ *Rudens*, 317–19, is an ‘ekphrasis’ of the pimp Labrax: the similarities between this portrayal and Pollux’s description of the Pimp mask are uncanny.¹²⁶ Pollux 4.145, gives the Pimp a bald head, long beard, curled lips and contracted eyebrows suggesting meddlesomeness. Labrax is a *recalvom . . . senem*. His eyebrows are *tortis* and his forehead is *contracta*, suggesting that he is *fraudulentus* and *probri plenus*. What is most unusual, though, in Plautus’ passage, but often goes unnoticed, is that it acknowledges explicitly the iconographic provenance of this gluttonous and licentious physiognomy: Labrax, says Trachalio, is a *Silenus senex* (= *Papposilēnos*!). The reference certainly has the touch of comic hyperbole, but specimens of the Pimp mask (from Lipari and elsewhere) show clearly that the connection is in fact archaeologically accurate, and further complement the characteristically satyric snub nose and protruding eyes. The villainous Labrax wears a Silenus-like mask while playing a role with possible references to a specific satyr play, where Silenus seems to be the villain, Aeschylus’ *Diktyoulkoi*.¹²⁷ The mask itself, here as often elsewhere, signals the intertextual game in broad terms.

¹²⁵ See Wiles (1988a), (1991: 102, 155); Petrides (2014a).

¹²⁶ Plautus’ passage was associated with Pollux already by Robert (1911). On the problem of Plautus’ masks see Petrides (2014b).

¹²⁷ A suggestion of Sutton (1978).

In yet more sophisticated cases, even in the absence of tangible visual continuity between comic and tragic masks, such could be constructed on the level of narrative: a case in point is Menander's *Sikyonioi*, 120ff. Pyrrhias scurries onto the stage to break what he perceives to be disastrous news (*Sik.* 127–9). Like his namesake in the *Dyskolos*, he has the function and probably the mask of a typical comic *servus currens*¹²⁸ (διὰ σπουδῆς] βαδίζων, *Sik.* 124).¹²⁹ Nonetheless, his intrinsically comic function is informed by verbal pointers to the tragic associations of his role: compare *Sik.* 124: καὶ σκυθρωπὸς ἔρχεται to *Eur. Hipp.* 1152: σπουδῇ σκυθρωπὸν πρὸς δόμους ὁρμώμενον or *Phoen.* 1333: σκυθρωπὸν ὄμμα καὶ πρόσωπον ἀγγέλου.¹³⁰ No mask of a comic slave is actually σκυθρωπός, although the πυρρός-haired Leading Slave, certainly a fitting mask for Pyrrhias, συνάγει τὸ ἐπισκύνιον (Pollux, 4.149). Anyhow, an impression of gloominess could be created if the actor displayed the mask at the right angle.¹³¹ Pyrrhias' mask is branded with the ethos of tragedy: his is a cross-breed role initiating an equally cross-breed scene, which seems to allude generically to the messenger scene of tragedy. But it may also be specifically reminiscent of one such scene in particular.

It is interesting to note that there is a distinctive similarity of situation between *Sik.* 120ff. and Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 924ff. This is the *locus classicus* of a messenger speech eliciting a roller-coaster of sorrow and delight. In both passages, a messenger, who arrives suddenly and unexpectedly,¹³² breaks the news to a son that one of his parents is no longer alive, but that he was not his/her child after all. Further revelations are reserved for later, but

¹²⁸ Csapo (1987), (1989) successfully challenges earlier notions that the type was more Roman than Greek.

¹²⁹ διὰ σπουδῆς suppl., e.g., Amott; καὶ μάλα σπουδῇ Sandbach, both on the evidence of *Eur. Hipp.* 1151: σπουδῇ ... ὁρμώμενον.

¹³⁰ See Belardinelli (1994: 133 ad 124–6) for more parallels from Roman New Comedy.

¹³¹ On the ability of the masked performer to manipulate the mask in such a way as to express a variety of emotions, see Meineck (2011: 130–4), who cites relevant experiments with masks of Noh, among others. See also Petrides (2013) for the characteristic case of the pantomime actor.

¹³² Stratophanes had apparently sent Pyrrhias to his foster-parents, to announce their safe return from abroad (Caria?), but 'his return is unexpected', cf. Gomme and Sandbach (1973: 641).

the road is now paved, albeit still unbeknown to the son, for him to be rehabilitated into his paternal city, with all the attendant consequences. A third party – Jocasta in Sophocles, Theron in Menander – witnesses the messenger's announcement and underscores its ironies. Both these *personae* react with various degrees of delight to the news, as soon as the corollaries for the sons involved are made, to their minds, clear (*Sik.* 131–3 with *OT* 977–83). But, although Theron's predictions will be verified apparently to the last detail of his marrying Malthake, Jocasta is sorely off the mark. It is a token of Menander's subversive irony that he chose to underpin a scene of genuine triumph with the paradigm of self-destructive delusion of triumph. The tragic intertext is displaced; as usual, intertextual over-determination rests on correspondence that is incomplete, as incomplete is the assimilation of the tragic messenger into the comic *servus currens*. Above all, what is important for the purposes of this chapter is that this whole intertextual play is ushered in by the 'tragic' way in which Pyrrhias plays his mask. The gestures and the movement of the actor here are but the performative equivalent of a 'tragic signature' in the metre or the insertion of a 'tragic' interjection in the speech.

In Greek theatre generic experimentation was facilitated by the institutional nature of genre. However closely Euripides' *Helen* could resemble a romantic comedy, however far Philemon's *seria* were pushed *ad coturnum* (Philemon, test. 7 K.-A.), their niche in the competition clinched their respective character as 'comedy' and 'tragedy'. Context, indeed the festival context, is to a large extent the linchpin that holds together protean genres like Greek comedy.¹³³ Fourth-century playwrights particularly seem to have taken full advantage of this idiom of Athenian theatrical culture. Generic boundaries could be attacked with impunity, as long as institutional barriers remained un-breached. Masks, I argue, worked in similar ways. Menander's masks remain undeniably comic, but on stage, deploying their iconographic hybridity, they perform their own allusiveness.

¹³³ On the issue, see Silk (2000: 68–9).

But here a word of caution is required. We should never forget that the comic actor's body may have relinquished the excessive padding and, of course, the phallus, but it still remained rather too down-to-earth to be equated with the heroes of myth. The costume is urban, the proportions are relatively realistic and, if we give credence to the figurines, rather on the portly side. Body, mask and speech (the register of New Comedy is almost invariably urban) form a continuum in New Comedy, too. This continuum constitutes a form of generic red line, a *caveat* advising that 'vertical' (paradigmatic) readings of New Comedy performance should only be pushed so far. Hybridity, after all, should be a heuristic term underlying the integrality of the tragic intertext in New Comedy; it is employed here with reference to what preceded Menander and not what followed in the history of Comedy as a genre (e.g., in the tragicomedy of the Renaissance).

3. *Mask and semiotisation: the role of physiognomics*

I hope to have shown convincingly that standardisation in the case of the mask, too, as of space, went hand in hand with hybridisation. It can be shown that also concomitant was semiotisation, the process whereby theatre avoids the presence of inert objects ('redundancy') by assigning an 'overriding signifying power'¹³⁴ to everything displayed on the stage. Such semiotisation affected mostly the facial features of the mask.

Crystallisation of types and semiotic readjustment appear to have been allied in fourth-century theatre at large: the development of the *onkos* on the tragic mask (from the later fifth century onwards) is a case in point. Let us be excused a short digression here, before we return to Menander, because it is important to keep in mind, at least as a general principle (alas, the evidence can only take us so far), that developments in New Comedy may not have been the solitary eccentricities of this genre alone.

Despite many ancient and modern derogatory remarks about its utility and significance, the *onkos*, a recurring differential in

¹³⁴ Elam (1980: 5).

Pollux's catalogue, seems to function as a classificatory principle in post-classical tragedy: some masks have *onkos*, others do not; among the masks that do, the *onkos* can be high, moderate or short. I will suggest one possible explanation as to the meaning and the theatrical utility of this classification.

Let us first look at the genera of Older and Young Men in the post-classical tragic mask system as outlined by Pollux. The triple gradation between the masks mentioned above (high, lower and low *onkos*) is clear enough in both these genera. Among the six masks of 'Old Men' (*gerontes*)¹³⁵ one mask is explicitly said to have *megas onkos* (Tragic Mask No. 4: *melas anēr*). Two masks are said to have *onkos* shorter (*onkon hēttō*) than the *melas* (Tragic Mask No. 5: *ksanthos anēr*, and No. 6: *ksanthoteros*), and another one (Tragic Mask No. 1: *ksyrias anēr*), has *onkos* that is not qualified (but it is distinctive enough?). Another *prosōpon* (Tragic Mask No. 2: *leukos anēr*) has short *onkos* (*brachys onkos*; this is perhaps implied also for Tragic Mask No. 3: *spartopolios*).

The same triple gradation seems to apply also to the eight masks of Young Men. Two masks (Tragic Mask No. 8: *oulos neaniskos*, and No. 9: *paroulos neaniskos*) are classed as *hyper-onkoi*. Another two masks (Tragic Mask No. 11: *pinaros*, and No. 12: second *pinaros*) are ὀγκώδεις (probably with sufficient *onkos*, but not as high as the previous two). No *onkos* is reported for four masks: No. 7 (*panchrēstos*), No. 10 (*hapalos*), No. 13 (*ōchros*) and No. 14 (*parōchros*). The latter two masks are fit for frail and sickly characters, so they can be assumed to have a short, indistinctive *onkos*, as they make their impression with signs other than bulk and grandeur. The *panchrēstos* and the *hapalos* are more ambiguous cases, especially the latter, which is 'fit for a handsome god' (*prepōn theōi kalōi*), for instance, Dionysus.

Looking at this classification, it seems reasonable to infer that the *onkos* can work well as a marker of status, a distinction of a sort that unfortunately we cannot specify further with certainty, although a form of political, social or moral excellence must be implied. The best indication to that effect suggestively comes not

¹³⁵ This term must denote a wider range of ages than in the case of New Comedy, as the masks are not called *pappoi*, but *andres*.

from the catalogue of men, but from that of women, who usually have very short or no *onkos* at all (hence, the presence of such an extension over the head would be even more notable). In one case, then, among tragic women masks the *onkos* is clearly connected with status: the highest (but still ‘moderate’) lamda-shaped extension among the masks of women belongs to the *polia katakomos*, who is ‘apart from all others in both age and status’ (ὑπὲρ τὰς ἄλλας τὴν τε ἡλικίαν καὶ τὴν ἀξίωσιν). The underlined term signifies that the tragic old woman with the long grey hair that falls on her shoulders stands out among the rest for the respect she commands, her reputation or her dignity (cf. *LSJ* s.v.). Such distinction may come from the wisdom of old age or from a distinguished social rank. Either way, Pollux informs us unequivocally, it is the *onkos* that most clearly marks this distinction. Likewise, it may also be indicative of *onkos* as a marker of status (or lack thereof) that the members of the chorus, either male or female, have no *onkos* at all.¹³⁶

Masks with very high *onkos*, however, are not found only among the two genera of free men, so the *onkos* must have had other semiotic functions, too, beyond marking out a character’s social or moral status. Two masks, the *sphēnopōgōn* (Tragic Mask No. 16) and the *anasillos* (Tragic Mask No. 17), although classified among the servants (*therapontes*), are both *hyperonkoi* (‘of very high *onkos*’). It cannot be insignificant that both these masks are expressly given to tragic messengers, the kind of pivotal character on whom the tragic plot often revolves and whose reliability (a form of moral standing, too, as it were, but of a different stripe) can barely be called into question (the character who doubts the words of an *aggelos* is usually wrong). The

¹³⁶ It is interesting to observe that the masks with the highest *onkos* and (if our hypothesis is correct) the highest status among free men (*melas anēr*, *oulos* and *paroulos neaniskos*) are also characterised as τραχύς (‘rough’) or βλοσυρός (‘sullen’ or ‘grim’), in terms of the expression of the face. Similarly, the masks with slightly shorter *onkos* than the previous two (the *pinaros* and second *pinaros*) also have pronouncedly ‘glum’ (κατηφής) countenances. The facial expression here seems to over-determine the *onkos* as a further visual enhancement of the social gravity and/or the solemnity of the personages. This is not to say that τραχύτης and βλοσυρότης are also markers of high status, but they are definitely signs that render this status even more visually imposing. Post-classical tragedy seems generally to have had a taste for the overkill in terms of dramatic effect.

messenger, too, is an imposing presence in a tragic play. The long, rhetorically embellished *aggelikai rhēseis* of tragedy must have been favourites among fourth-century and Hellenistic actors. If Lycophron's *Alexandra*, which is couched as such a tragic messenger speech, is any gauge, the anthologising tendency of Hellenistic performance must have singled out the messenger for solo display as much as lyric odes or other iambic *rhēseis* from tragedy.¹³⁷ Rather than social status, therefore, in the case of the messenger at least, the *onkos* appears to be connected with dramatic status, that is, dramatic consequence and significance.

I think we can conclude, with all due reservation, that, as a marker either of social status or of dramatic consequence, the *onkos* as a theatrical sign seems to have functioned as a form of spotlight on the post-classical tragic stage. The *onkos*, that is, categorises the masks and, at the same time, contributes to semi-otising this categorisation: the lamda-shaped extension of the head, which gives an air of magnificence and grandeur to the mask, could concretise and quantify the power relations and/or the dramatic dynamics of fourth-century tragedy in clear visual terms. One usually thinks of standardisation simply as the configuration of typical masks for typical characters; what the example of the *onkos* shows, though, is that standardisation can also entail the formulation of a comprehensive set of visual cues. Standardisation and semiotisation are contiguous processes, historically as well as functionally.

The significant change effected in New Comedy is that the actor's 'face' is no longer expressionless or the bearer of an enigmatic, ambiguous expression as in classical tragedy, nor is it a caricature of the human form as in Old Comedy: it is an expressive face, seemingly naturalistic but, significantly, loaded with semiosis and ideology. Because the expressivity of the New Comedy mask is neither mere mimesis of a muscular reaction nor simply a manifestation of emotion; it is also an insinuation of inner ethical proclivities. In other words, there is little credible doubt that in

¹³⁷ On the anthological culture of Hellenistic performance, see Gentili (1979: 13–62).

New Comedy (perhaps in contemporary tragedy, too) the facial features of the mask are now heavily over-determined by physiognomics;¹³⁸ that is to say, elements of *opsis* previously simply iconic now shift to a more meaningful indexical or even symbolic function. The position of the eyebrow on the forehead can now signify anything between meddlesomeness and flattery, arrogance or smugness, naiveté or moroseness;¹³⁹ an oxen-like nose shows despondence; an eagle-like nose, magnanimity; a snub nose, lust; a hooked nose, shamelessness, and so on and so forth.¹⁴⁰ Everything on the mask can now be a sign.

Theatrical archaeologists recognise the effect of physiognomical elaboration mostly on the so-called New Style masks of comedy.¹⁴¹ developed around the time of Menander, this novel kind of mask elaborates the features of the face in ways reflecting artistic and philosophical principles verified in other contemporary genres of art. In fact, being clear evidence of that sharpened appreciation of spectacle that we postulated in the beginning of this chapter as characteristic of a new performance culture under

¹³⁸ The bibliography on physiognomics is vast. The standard edition of the texts is Foerster (1893). For updated versions and commentaries on individual treatises, see André (1981); Raina (1993); Vogt (1999). Evans (1969), until recently the basic aid, neglects such central issues as ideology, performance and gender, but still provides a very useful overview of the sources. An influx of major recent books has bridged this gap, although some lay emphasis exclusively on the Second Sophistic. Sassi (1988) reads physiognomics as a branch of a Greek 'science of Man'. Barton (1994: esp. 95–131), juxtaposing physiognomics to other techniques of prognostication, analyses the discipline as a 'taxonomy of [social] control' – on this see also Crapis (1991). Gleason (1995: esp. 55–81) focuses on the role of physiognomics in the construction of masculinity. Also useful are Misener (1924) on *eikonismos*; Dagron (1987) and Battagazzore (1998) on the 'zoological method'; Garland (1995: 87–104) on the challenge posed to the physiognomical paradigm by deformity and monstrosity; and Tsouna (1998) on physiognomics in the context of philosophical debates about the knowability of other people's minds. Expanding the question beyond the immediate Greek world (after all, physiognomics was a constant across many regions and many centuries until the modern day), Borrmann (1994: esp. 1–33) provides evidence for the possible Mesopotamian origins of physiognomics; Popovic (2007) looks at physiognomics in Judaism; whereas Swain (2007) tracks the fortunes of Polemon in particular from classical antiquity to medieval Islam. More generally, and with a view to modern developments, Gombrich (1994) unpacks physiognomics as a cognitive act.

¹³⁹ On the forehead and the eyebrows, see, e.g., Arist. *Hist. Anim.* 491b14–8; [Arist.] *Phgn.* 812b25–8; Pollux, 2.49. There is a certain fluidity in physiognomical determinations; on how to deal with it, see below.

¹⁴⁰ On the nose, see, e.g., [Arist.] *Phgn.* 811a37–811b6.

¹⁴¹ *MINC*³, vol. 1, 55. On Old and New Style masks see above, fn. 74.

formation, physiognomics was everywhere in the fourth century: from the schools of philosophy (especially the Peripatos) to the Assembly, and from the artist's atelier to the law court. New-fangled inwardness prevailed in both the painting (Polygnotus) and the sculpture (Lysippus) of this period.¹⁴² Especially the rise of portraiture cannot have been unrelated to the art of the mask-maker.¹⁴³ Vitally, Hellenistic portraiture responded to 'two crucial developments in late Classical culture: the increasing separation of roles in the citizen body of the polis and the simultaneous elaboration of the visual languages of dress, coiffure, gesture and posture that could speak to these roles'.¹⁴⁴ Society as much as theatre was becoming, at least on a discursive level, a standardised scheme of things, and one of the portrait's most vital functions was to position the subject in this context.¹⁴⁵ The mask performs a similar function in the microcosm of the play.

Physiognomics as a general 'consciousness'¹⁴⁶ was a cultural stream running uninterrupted from Homer to Byzantium (and beyond).¹⁴⁷ Already in 1991, pre-empting attacks against the 'supposed conventional meaning' of the masks,¹⁴⁸ David Wiles cautioned against turning a blind eye 'to a complex ideological system which provides a semantic key to the system of masks in New Comedy'.¹⁴⁹ After the impressive body of work on physiognomics and Greek cultural discourse that emerged from the mid-

¹⁴² On the representation of *ēthos* in fourth-century art, see Rouveret (1989: 129–61).

¹⁴³ On physiognomics and the Hellenistic plastic art in general, see Amberger-Lahrmann (1996). On Greek portraiture, cf. Fischer-Hansen *et al.* (1992). On physiognomics, the iconography of Alexander and Lysippus, cf. Kiilerich (1988). The interplay between image and royal ideology is examined in Bulloch *et al.* (1993).

¹⁴⁴ Andrew Stewart in Bulloch *et al.* (1993: 200). ¹⁴⁵ Cf. Smith (1993: 203).

¹⁴⁶ For the term, see Garland (1995).

¹⁴⁷ The fact that the physiognomic treatises we know come from the third century BC onwards cannot be held against their relevance for the comedy of Menander. As the frequent references to the 'old physiognomists' show (cf. [Arist.] *Phgn.* 805a18–19: οἱ μὲν οὖν προγεγεννημένοι φυσιογνώμονες), and regardless of whether these 'physiognomists' were systematic enough practitioners of a discipline with a scientific claim or simply poets, philosophers or other writers who bespeak a tendency to physiognomise, the physiognomic manuals encoded and systematised the *Zeitgeist*. Furthermore, they were to a large extent anticipated by such works as the Hippocratic *Air, Waters, Places* and *Epidemiae*, Aristotle's *Analytica Priora* (70b7ff.) and others.

¹⁴⁸ Such as Poe (1996). See also Marshall (2006). ¹⁴⁹ Wiles (1991: 85–6).

1990s onwards, scepticism as to the role of physiognomics is untenable. A more detailed discussion of physiognomics, and a rebuttal of the arguments against its utility in the study of New Comedy, follows in [Chapter 3](#). For now let us unpack the quintessence of physiognomics as a ‘science’ and how it contributes to the semiotisation of the mask.

Physiognomics examines the empathy between body and soul,¹⁵⁰ which allows the trained eye to gauge a person’s *ēthos*, that is, his predisposition towards virtue or vice, by deciphering his external appearance. It is thus an *enthymēma ek sēmeiōn*: internal causes are manifested as external symptoms or telltale signs.¹⁵¹ Physiognomics break the body down into vehicles of moral significance (facial features and expression, shape of body, movement, gesture, voice, etc.). These signifiers are directly evocative of a psychosomatic ideal, cultured and context-specific, and yet strikingly constant through the centuries, from Homer to the Church Fathers, and from pseudo-Aristotle to Polemon.¹⁵² Such binaries as human/beast, man/woman, free/slave, Greek/barbarian, remained conservative in the ancient world especially within the framework of the *polis*, but also long after its decline. The polis, not exclusively the democratic one, established what Sassi called ‘a cult of social decorum’, which became ‘an almost obsessive criterion for deciding what is and what is not civil behavior’.¹⁵³ Physiognomics is one of the tools whereby adherence to this social decorum is appraised, usually with the objective of unmasking deviance and abnormality, tokens of potentially

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Arist. *An. pr.* 70b7–9: ‘it is possible to physiognomise if one accepts that the natural workings of the organism affect simultaneously the body and the soul’ (τὸ δὲ φυσιογνωμονεῖν δυνατόν ἐστιν εἴ τις δίδωσιν ἅμα μεταβάλλειν τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ὅσα φυσικὰ ἐστί παθήματα); [Arist.] *Phgn.* 808b11–14: ‘it appears to be that soul and body are coordinated in their physical reactions; and any change in the habit of the soul effects a similar change in the shape of the body, and vice-versa, when the shape of the body is altered, it alters together the habit of the soul’ (δοκεῖ δέ μοι ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ σῶμα συμπαθεῖν ἀλλήλοις· καὶ ἡ τῆς ψυχῆς ἔξις ἀλλοιουμένη συναλλοιοῖ τὴν τοῦ σώματος μορφήν, πάλιν τε ἡ τοῦ σώματος μορφή ἀλλοιουμένη συναλλοιοῖ τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ἔξιν).

¹⁵¹ [Arist.] *Phgn.* 806a22–4: ‘the art of physiognomising, as the term itself denotes, deals with the physical manifestations of the workings of the mind’ (ἡ μὲν οὖν φυσιογνωμονία ἐστὶ, καθάπερ καὶ τοῦνομα αὐτῆς λέγει, περὶ τὰ φυσικὰ παθήματα τῶν ἐν τῇ διανοίᾳ).

¹⁵² On Homer and physiognomics, see Evans (1948); on the Church Fathers, Asmus (1906); for echoes of physiognomics in late Byzantium, Petrides (2009).

¹⁵³ Sassi (1988: 66).

dangerous aberration.¹⁵⁴ In physiognomics, three fundamental discourses of polis culture intersect, hence they should be brought to bear on our readings of Menander's masks: gender and gendered forms of propriety;¹⁵⁵ civic ideology, 'the imaginary relationship of individuals to the real conditions of their existence';¹⁵⁶ and, last but not least, performance of status and the self.

This last notion is crucial. In classical society individual male identity was subject to, and conditional upon, public *epideixis*, determined in relation to theoretical (i.e., prejudicial) constructions of Self and Other. In the words of Simon Goldhill, the intensely competitive culture of the polis provided 'space for the contests of manhood'. Notions such as *agōn*, *epideixis*, *schēma*, all relevant with the performance of the self, show how laborious and anxiety-ridden constructing character was for the Greeks:

Schēma is the physical appearance presented to the gaze of the citizens – appearance which may be simply what is seen, a "form", but which also may be a mere appearance, a semblance or concealment of true nature. The connection of gait (βάδισμα), expression and attitude repeatedly epitomises a man's *schēma* . . . The gaze of the citizens, in which honour and status are contested, constructs the citizen's bodily appearance as a *schēma* open to evaluation, regulation and scrutiny. It is the gap between *schēma* as form and *schēma* as appearance that allows for the performance of self – that is, the self-presentation, self-regulation, self-concealment which construct or stage the citizen in the public eye.¹⁵⁷

'To follow the thought-patterns of the physiognomist', writes Maud Gleason, 'is to enter the forest of eyes that made up what we lightly call today "the face-to-face society" of the ancient Mediterranean city. This was a world in which the scrutiny of faces was not an idle pastime but an essential survival skill.'¹⁵⁸ It was also, as Tamsyn Barton notes, a coercive 'taxonomy of control',¹⁵⁹ an aggressive gaze, which, by way of semiotising public comportment, created a system of reference, which sustained the power

¹⁵⁴ On the physiognomists' obsession with deviance, cf. Gleason (1995: 60).

¹⁵⁵ On masculine and feminine types of *ēthos*, see [Arist.] *Phgn.* 809a26ff., with Gleason (1995: 58–9): 'Gender is independent of anatomical sex . . . Hence "masculine" and "feminine" function as physiognomical categories for both male and female subjects.'

¹⁵⁶ Althusser (1971: 172). A useful introduction to ideology is offered by Csapo (2005: 262–315).

¹⁵⁷ Goldhill (1999: 4). ¹⁵⁸ Gleason (1995: 55). ¹⁵⁹ Barton (1994: 96).

network in the polis. A pastiche of mundane observation, prejudice, superstition, medical and scientific knowledge and rhetorical tropes, physiognomics is overarched by the desire to prescribe, to normalise and to naturalise. What one observes in physiognomics is a readiness to imprint the rules of socio-political engagement on the micro-level: a nose, a complexion, a hairdo. A citizen's face, and, by extension, a late classical actor's mask, is a mirror upon which the very sanity of the polis is to be measured (Chapter 5 will provide a case study of this principle).

Physiognomics is, therefore, a powerful conceptual apparatus, both a natural instinct and a deliberate, ideologically laden practice. Applying the methods of physiognomics, the Greeks weighed their fellow humans: the likes of Thersites, the ugliest and (*sc.* hence!) the most insolent man ever to set foot on Troy (Homer, *Il.* 2.216); a woman intended to become one's wife (Semonides, *Against Women*); or a hateful adversary in court (Dem. 45.68–9). As a methodical, self-conscious activity, as opposed to a general 'consciousness', physiognomics started to flourish at the end of the fifth century BC, with the first boom of Greek medicine.¹⁶⁰ The late fifth and early fourth centuries already boasted their first 'star' physiognomists in figures like Zopyrus and Loxus.¹⁶¹ It was in the fourth century, however, that physiognomics obtained its most secure underpinnings, thanks to the researches of the Peripatetics.

The cocky confidence of somebody like Zopyrus or Cleanthes in their ability to read people easily and accurately was a professional ploy.¹⁶² A sincerer attitude, as suggested, was anxiety. The

¹⁶⁰ Some later scholars credited Hippocrates as the *prōtos heuretēs* of physiognomics: for what is worth, the term *physiognomiē* is first attested in *Ἐπιδημικά*, 2.5. Others (Hippolytus, *Refut. Haeres.* 1.2; Porphyry, *Vit. Pythag.* 13) give this honour to Pythagoras.

¹⁶¹ On the fifth-century physiognomist Zopyrus, see Yalouris (1986). On Loxus, see Misener (1923); Evans (1969: 10–11). Misener dated Loxus, whose work is only known to us through the Anonymus Latinus, in the early fourth century BC, on the strength of Loxus' theories being halfway between Empedocles' theory of the blood as the seat of the soul and Aristotle's theory of *mesotēs*. Evans, by contrast, reinstated Foerster's third-century BC dating, based on correspondences between Loxus and the Stoics.

¹⁶² To his serious embarrassment, based on Socrates' 'satyric' countenance, Zopyrus diagnosed the philosopher to be of a lustful and wicked nature. Cleanthes, on his part, was allegedly able to discern a *kinaidos*, even if he took great pains to disguise his deviance, merely by the way the pathic sneezed (Diog. Laert. 7.173).

general premise, that ‘moral disposition can be perceived from external form’ (Diog. Laert. 7.173), was exposed to a process of dissimulation, concealment and deception. The Greeks were fully aware of a person’s potential to contrive, or shape up (*plattesthai*, *schēmatizesthai*), his external appearance in a way that would put ‘a screen over his true character’ (πρόβλημα τοῦ τρόπου τὸ σχῆμα, Dem. 45.69). They entertained no fantasies about a royal road leading from the exterior to the interior. Unrelenting tension between evidence and recognition marks out physiognomics as a cognitive act, whose purpose is precisely to pierce through the smoke screen of *schēma*, to re-establish, by observing supposedly permanent and unadulterated features of disposition, the continuum of body and soul which dissimulation can upset.¹⁶³ It is important to remember that the physiognomic sign is a *sēmeion* (sign), not a *tekmērion* (a proof; Arist. *Rhet.* 1357b1ff.). A *tekmērion* is *anagkaion*, ‘necessary’ (if a man has a fever, this is proof that he is certainly sick). A *sēmeion*, on the contrary, is *mē anagkaion*, ‘not necessary’; it connects the particular (*to kath’ hekaston*) to the universal (*to katholou*), but this connection cannot be reduced to any syllogistic form. It is thus, I argue, as a complex, non-linear process of interpretation, not as some form of cryptogram with a fixed and given ‘message’, that New Comedy encodes physiognomic signs on its masks – even more so, as I will try to show in [Chapter 3](#), when it comes to the masks of young men, in whom *tropos* or *ēthos* was a faculty still in the course of formation.

By transforming the physical features of the mask into theatrical signs, physiognomics is cross-referencing the performance world with its cultural frame and introduces a dialectics with civic ideology. This is an intertextual endeavour in its own right, by way of the visual – another, distinct case of intervisuality. This function was absent in both the masks of Old Comedy and fifth-century tragedy. Old Comedy masks certainly registered *pathos*, especially of the carnal sort, but carried little ethical information. They were certainly spectacular, but conducive to a more outward

¹⁶³ This is, of course, how Demosthenes exposes Stephanus’ feigned ‘propriety’ as misanthropy.

kind of spectacle. Similarly, the ambiguously expressionless face of the fifth-century tragic hero – in Jacques Lecoq’s famous phrase, ‘un visage ... en équilibre, [qui] doit servir à ressentir *l’état de neutralité* préalable à l’action, un état de réceptivité à ce qui nous environne’¹⁶⁴ – served purposes other than the signification of *ēthos*. Both New Comedy and (most probably) fourth-century tragedy developed inward masks, expressive of moral choice. To achieve as much New Comedy toned down or did away completely with the grotesque, whereas tragedy followed a slippery slope to the bizarre specimens which was so abhorred by Lucian in the second century AD (*De Salt.* 27–9):¹⁶⁵ opposite trajectories stemming, nonetheless, from the same initial instigation, to create theatrical meaning by visual means, too.

The visual input of the mask is indispensable in New Comedy: it combines the genre’s intertextual, hybrid nature with the ideology of the city-state and its tortuous implications. The following chapters of this book will revolve around this fundamental characteristic of the genre from different angles each time. [Chapter 3](#) in particular will revert to the notion of physiognomics in association with the Greek notions of *ēthos*, *prohairesis* and *praxis*, which underpin Menander’s idea of character. As a summary of what has been said so far and in anticipation of that discussion, let me articulate here what I understand to be the fundamental principles one must hold into account in order to avoid the misapplication of Physiognomics as a tool in New Comedy hermeneutics:

(a) As argued in the previous paragraphs, in a period growing ever more alert to the workings of spectacle, physiognomics provides clues to character, which are rarely straightforward and univocal. The Athenian imaginary loaded the physiognomical exercise with a significant amount of anxiety. In theatre this open-endedness of physiognomics is a powerful tool in the hands of the playwright (and the mask-maker). The mask does not ‘serve’ the character to the audience. It launches a process of

¹⁶⁴ Lecoq (1997: 47).

¹⁶⁵ On Lucian’s *On Dance*, the tragic and the pantomime mask, see Petrides (2013).

character construction, in which the visual now plays a much more delicate part than before.

(b) As suggested in [Chapter 1](#), New Comedy characters are not simply 'iconic' representations of real-life counterparts. They are more often than not, always in a comical manner, also projected upon mythical (tragic) paradigms. Thus, their actions, and inevitably their masks, too, are intertextually over-determined (what they do or say, often how they look as well, is to be gauged with reference to their intertextual alters). Characterisation in New Comedy is a process that works verbally as much as visually, contextually as much as intertextually (which means also intervisually).

The following points will be elaborated in [Chapters 3 and 4](#).

(c) Physiognomics makes the masks 'inward', but no associations can be made with any modern notions of character. In order to understand Menander's use of the mask, we need to get rid of some modern preconceptions, which still plague New Comedy criticism and re-establish the playwright's Greek frames of reference.

(d) Physiognomic clues are not to be read in isolation, as if one can weigh more than another. They are also not to be confused with the parts of a puzzle or with the tesserae of a mosaic, which need to coalesce perfectly. As physiognomics is vindicated in the real-time of social interaction, it produces results by way of holistic impressions. Supposed 'inconsistencies', which may arise if one insists on analysing faces (or masks) as if in a laboratory, looking for a sense of unity and totality pertinent to modern notions of personality, are either indiscernible in real communication or indeed semiotically significant, and thus not to be discarded as aberrant, in the theatre.

(e) Finally, not only are physiognomic clues working within a whole, but the mask also is part of a system: the mask is relational and dialogic. No theatrical mask, hence no physiognomy, can make sense independently of the other masks with which it converses directly or indirectly (see further in [Chapter 4](#)).



Figure 2.4 Specimen of the *agroikos* mask from Lipari (inv. 10778)

Reading physiognomies one reads signs, *sēmeia* not *tekmēria*, which may or may not result in the anticipated course of action, and which may or may not align with the verbal signs of the play. Such an ‘exercise’ creates undeniable theatrical momentum, but also reveals how central the mask should be in the criticism of any New Comedy play. Let us conclude this section with an example, the Gorgias of *Dyskolos*.

The most common assumption is that this character is wearing the *agroikos* mask (Pollux, Comic Mask No. 14) (Figure 2.4). This is as reasonable an inference as any, not least because thus his contrast with Sostratos, the man-about-town, would stand out in relief. However, no study, as far as I know, has pursued the implications of this casting in the real-time of performance.¹⁶⁶ Modern scholars *read* a rather stern, hard-working youngster, reasonable beyond his years, who bears so many discrete yet disconcerting similarities with Knemon and emphatically states that ‘he cannot have the luxury of love’ (*Dysk.* 341–2). At first sight, it is highly questionable whether this character is comic at all, and indeed Gorgias is given no comic routine per se in the play. Yet this is an erroneous impression, the result of textual bias. For the Athenian audience *saw* a character, whose mask was

¹⁶⁶ Except for Handley (1965: 35), who saw that ‘departure from type’ in this case is the result of visual signs.

Acknowledging the mask

imprinted with physiognomic indications of lust, sluggishness and stupidity.¹⁶⁷ The plot thickens when one realises that the *agroikos* mask is most probably a remnant of Middle Comedy, where the *agroikos* was exactly what the physiognomy of the mask suggests: a slow moron, who falls victim to the wiles of urban *hetairai* due to his lustful urges.¹⁶⁸

One completely misses the humour in Gorgias – and the new sophistication of the visual element in Menander – if one fails to see how completely at loggerheads with each other visual and verbal cues are in this case. We need to develop a discursive understanding of physiognomical indications as loci of semantic tension, whose significance arises only in the complex web that is the performance. Gorgias carries the ‘genes’ of his type’s theatrical ancestry at the same time as he contradicts his expected actant as young lover. He is generically destined and ethically predisposed for a life of love, yet destitution has turned him to a *heksis* of loveless toil. Such *heksis* can carve a new *ēthos* – of the Knemon sort. No other element underscores the thematic significance of Gorgias better than this dialectic between the visual and the verbal.

The presence of the mask needs to be acknowledged always in Menander. The mask furnishes an indispensable third dimension to the characters. Characters in New Comedy cannot be dissociated from their masks without being robbed of a determinative allusive nexus, without turning them into empty sentimental shells.

Acknowledging the mask

‘Acknowledging the mask’, however, is admittedly easier said than done. First and foremost, there is the pitfall of looking to

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Pollux, 4.147 (Mask No. 14): ‘The Agroikos has a dark complexion, wide lips and a snub nose’ (τῷ δ’ ἀγροίκῳ τὸ μὲν χρῶμα μελαινεται, τὰ δὲ χεῖλη πλατέα καὶ ἡ ῥίς σιμή, καὶ στεφάνη τριχῶν). For thick lips, see [Arist.] *Phgn.* 811a24–5: ‘those who have fleshy lips whose upper part hangs over the lower part are idiots’ (οἱ δὲ τὰ χεῖλη ἔχοντες παχέα καὶ τὸ ἄνω τοῦ κάτω προκρεμώμενον μωροί). For the snub nose, see [Arist.] *Phgn.* 811b2: ‘those who have a snub nose are lustful’ (οἱ δὲ σιμήν [ῥίνα] ἔχοντες λάγνοι). For puffy cheeks (as evinced by the archaeological specimens), Adamantius, 2.27: ‘know that those who have puffy cheeks are sluggish and drunkards’ (παρεῖσθι σαρκώδεσι ῥαθυμίαν καὶ οἶνοφλυγίαν παρεῖναι λέγε).

¹⁶⁸ On the *agroikos* in Middle Comedy, see Konstantakos (2004).

reconstruct Menander's original attributions of masks to characters. Such archaeological positivism was common in the early days. Trying to 'prove', nevertheless, that character X wore mask Y in the original performance is obviously fraught with hazards. Some suggestions are entirely plausible (the range of possibilities, after all, is not endless). There are cases, for example, in which we can identify masks and characters beyond reasonable doubt. Such are few, but they do avail themselves to us. Pollux, for example, for all his shortcomings, leaves little room for doubt that the professional soldier normally donned the first *episeistos* mask (Pollux, Comic Mask No. 15), especially since material evidence corroborates this attribution. This soldier interacted on stage with, among others, parasites and flatterers, for whom the *parasitos* or the *kolax* (Pollux, Comic Masks Nos 17 and 18) are also a straightforward choice. Constructive speculation about the semiotics and semantics of this interaction can ensue from this point on (see [Chapter 4](#)). There are also cases like that of Gorgias, or that of the *panchrēstos* mask, I shall argue in [Chapter 5](#) (Pollux, Comic Mask No. 10), in which the characters possess tangible, objective qualities that allow us to connect them with particular masks with more than a fair chance that our conjecture is correct. But already here we are entering the realm of interpretation. We should be careful with our speculations on which character wore which mask, even in cases that seem to invite themselves. This is, for instance, the case of the first and second *episeistos* masks.¹⁶⁹ The association of the two in Pollux's catalogue is indeed very strong, and I still harbour the suspicion that the Soldier's rivals, or some of them, would make very good sense in the second *episeistos*. I have to recognise now, however, that when moving from this broad notion to the particular plays one needs to tread very lightly. Other masks, such as the *hapalos*, can be applicable in the same cases, and if so, the semiosis of the performance changes completely. In the best of cases, most of our suggestions, however likely, will be educated guesses that still defy archaeological demonstration. In the worst of cases, our arguments can be circular: speculatively, we point to

¹⁶⁹ I was myself once too sure about this latter interplay, see Petrides (2005b).

mask Y, because we perceive character X to be so and so; then we go back to read character X through the conduit of mask Y. Such accumulation of conjecture can have evident distorting results.

The 'historical truth', in the sense of the actual casting of the actual performance, in the absence of archaeological, didascalic or other information, is beyond our grasp. There are also many things we do not know about the general practice of troupes working with masks when preparing for a performance. We have no evidence as to how masks were cast for a play, by whom, when and why, especially in a period in which the plays were not written for one single performance, but for multiple performances in and out of Athens. The semantic boundaries between the various masks are not entirely clear to our minds either. Menander certainly must have written his plays with particular masks in mind, but what about the re-performances that were out of his control? Did subsequent *didaskaloi* of Menander's plays, especially the *Technitai*, who operated under special conditions for that matter, feel bound by the author's original indications (if they were indeed spelled out)? Casting a mask for a character is, after all, the first step towards conceiving a play directorially. Either way, we cannot know.

Be that as it may, though, being overly sceptical is equally pernicious, because more often than not such an attitude makes scholars disregard the mask altogether. We can be fairly certain that Menander created theatre that utilised visual methods of creating meaning as never before. In this type of theatre different castings of masks ultimately create different characters on stage, with special hues and dissimilar emphases. So ignoring the mask would be tantamount to closing our eyes to arguably the single most important semiotic component of the performance. Middle ground must and can be cut between naive positivism and inert agnosticism, if we establish sound methodological principles.

Trying to establish the playwright's likely range of options and allowing for alternative possibilities, rather than going for the one undeniable casting, is one productive way to proceed. Anyhow, it cannot be ruled out that the conventions of theatrical production in the Hellenistic period allowed such flexibility of association, a certain leeway to cast the same character in different masks of

similar semantic range every time according to the *didaskalos*' conception of the performance. This is beyond proof, but it is an enticing thought, indeed, since most of Menander's characters are too complex, too multifarious and too un-stereotypical to be locked in one mask alone anyway.

Take Pamphile of the *Epitrepontes*, for example. Modern scholars are convinced, not without good reason, that this unusual and ambivalent female character was designed for one of the two *pseudokorē* masks, which probably represented the 'seduced maiden'.¹⁷⁰ But is this the only possibility for Pamphile? In a recent study by Eftychia Bathrellou (2009), who subscribes to the aforesaid idea, the *pseudokorē* mask was posited to be 'hovering between wife [represented by the *lektikē* and the *oulē* masks] and maiden' (represented by the *korē*).¹⁷¹ Such categorisation of Pol-lux's female types is generally cogent; though, as Simon¹⁷² saw and Bathrellou herself admits, Pamphile is not entirely in place with the *pseudokorē*.¹⁷³ She is a married woman, not particularly *neogamos* ('newly-wed') at that, and the mother of a child. Our conceptions, for sure, were not necessarily Menander's (or his subsequent *didaskalos*). We must examine other possibilities, too. Building on Simon's work one could suggest as an alternative casting for Pamphile the *lektikē*, the 'talker': or, better, 'the woman who can talk'. Whereas the *pseudokorē* would underscore Pamphile's liminality and ambiguity, the *lektikē* would draw attention to her role as an unusually empowered and eloquent female (see the relevant discussion in Chapter 1). Characters like Pamphile open up a whole new dimension for mask-casting. As she can be variously conceived as a character, she is variously playable in mask. Each different selection of a different mask for her is practically a different materialisation of the *dramatis persona* in the real-time of performance, a changed Pamphile (and, since the characters and their masks are communicating vessels, a changed *Epitrepontes* by extension).

Even speculative discussions of different possible mask castings for Menander's characters, as long as they avoid the snares

¹⁷⁰ Robert (1911: 41 nn. 6, 74).

¹⁷¹ Bathrellou (2009: 230).

¹⁷² A. K. H. Simon (1938: 102).

¹⁷³ Bathrellou (2009: 231).

Conclusion

and follow some of the principles outlined above, can re-establish something of the original Menandrian spectator's experience. Of course, unless there are good grounds for certainty, any use of the mask in the reading of plays must be made heuristically, not positively, with the ultimate purpose of showing how Menander's performance must have worked in general terms. This is the farthest our evidence can take us, and this must be conceded. We cannot entertain fantasies that it is feasible to come any closer to how Menander's *Epitrepontes* was first performed and received. Nonetheless, acknowledging the mask and its potential input into Menander's performance discourse can be a major breakthrough in the study of this genre and this is something on which we should insist.

Conclusion: what is then 'new' in New Comedy performance?

This chapter has pointed to a number of significant shifts in the performance of New Comedy. First of all, New Comedy tones down the extrovert, grotesque spectacularity of Old Comedy; it does not make use of the apparently sensational visual effects of contemporary tragedy, either. However, it creates a spectacle where the visual is densely semiotised, brimful of allusive potential. Furthermore, I argued, the interlocking processes of standardisation, hybridisation and semiotisation created a new, loaded sense of theatrical space and a novel kind of mask compared with earlier comedy. The visual thus plays a central role, too, in the referentiality of the genre – with respect mainly to tragedy, but not tragedy alone. In an era of growing alertness to the minutiae of appearances and their symbolic cache, New Comedy exploits the potential of spectacle to 'call in', just as effectively as verbal signs, systems of theatrical and extratheatrical reference. If Menander's performance is intertextual, it is 'intervisual' as well.

OF GREEKS AND OTHERS: MASK, CHARACTER AND ACTION IN NEW COMEDY

There is more of humour in our English writers than in any of the other comic poets, ancient or modern . . .

William Congreve (1670–1729), in a letter to John Dennis

This chapter argues further on the importance, in Menander's performance, of the visual input of a new kind of mask, which is now densely semiotised. The chapter revolves specifically around the close interplay between mask, character and action, in an attempt to show how the physiognomic make-up of the mask associates with the Aristotelian philosophical ideas that shape Menander's perception of *ēthos*. The construction of character in Menander is not tantamount to any straightforward 'decoding' of the mask's physiognomy, to adding up, as it were, the semiotic value of its individual features. It is a much more elaborate interpretive project, which requires the spectator to pay close attention to the way the ethical predispositions denoted by the mask materialise in the moment of moral deliberation and then develop into actual moral choices. The process becomes even more intricate, since the signification of the mask, thus the character's predisposition to certain kinds of action, is always overdetermined in Menander by the general intertextual baggage of the character, most importantly his comic ancestry and possible tragic intertexts, as I hope to have shown in the previous chapters.

Constructing character in New Comedy, therefore, engages the mask in a pregnant semiotic game, intertextual as well as intervisual, acted out in the real-time of performance. What is most interesting here, what renders the otherwise linear moral sequence from natural disposition (*ēthos*) to purposive choice (*prohairesis*) and finally to action (*praxis*) fraught with the possibility of conflict and reversal – in other words, what makes this process highly theatrical – is that the two genera of characters whose actions usually motivate the plot in

Menander, namely, young and old men (*neaniskoi* and *pappoi*), are by Aristotelian definition either immature or deteriorating moral agents. The moral choices of immature young men and declining πᾶπτοι can indeed be contradictory, even ‘inconsistent’ in their moral behaviour, if one remembers the aspersions cast on the importance of physiognomics for the mask by some scholars, inasmuch as their deliberative faculties are still either undeveloped or abating. Aristotle even has a name for this kind of ‘inconsistency’ in young men, namely, the slippage between moral knowledge and moral action, acknowledging and performing what is right: ἀκράσια (‘incontinence, want of self-control’).

Distorting lenses

In the latter part of [Chapter 2](#), we saw that some New Comedy scholars¹ deny the utility of physiognomics, and, by extension, virtually of the mask itself, as a hermeneutic key for the comedy of Menander. I will try to prove that this scepticism is not advisable. On the one hand, it misuses the principles of physiognomics even against the explicit cautions of the two Peripatetic authors of the *Physiognomonika*. On the other hand, in an error of more far-reaching consequences, it results from recycling such ideas as (a) a quest for ‘unity’ in character (which causes a consequent intolerance of contradiction); and (b) the supposed opposition between character and ‘type’ (the latter equated with the ‘stock’ mask), which in this context implicates a ‘true self’ buried deep beneath a concealing or falsifying surface that is again the mask. I hope to show that both these ideas are un-Greek, hence un-Menandrian. Even the Aristotelian notion of *homalon*, ‘consistency’, does not make for a unified *ēthos* in the sense postulated by Poe, much less so in the case of immature or declining moral agents, who are less than *homaloi* by definition: indeed, they are, in Aristotelian lingo, ‘consistently inconsistent’, *homalōs anōmaloi*).²

¹ Most trenchantly, Joe Park Poe (1996) in an influential article, which denied altogether ‘the supposed conventional meaning of the masks’.

² Cf. Arist. *Poet.* 1454a. According to Aristotle, *ēthos*, which in this case means depiction of character (‘characterisation’), must be *chrēston* (virtuous), *harmotton* (appropriate to the status or the nature of the character), *homoion* (verisimilar) and *homalon* (consistent).

Let us start with the arguments on which this sweeping denial of ‘the supposed conventional meaning of dramatic masks’ is usually founded. The objections are twofold.

(a) That Pollux’s catalogue is of very questionable value for the New Comedy scholar. On top of the usual criticisms against Pollux’s deficiencies, some scholars now deny that his catalogue accords with the archaeological record at all. Such collections of evidence as the Lipari masks, which are generally thought to corroborate Pollux’s validity, are said to show quite the opposite: that the masks of New Comedy were not as conventional and standardised as usually maintained.

(b) That physiognomics in general, and the pseudo-Aristotelian *Physiognomonika* in particular, are not applicable to the study of the New Comedy mask. Poe (1996) examines those physical features most often brought to bear in Pollux’s catalogue (hairstyle and hair colour, beard, movement of the eyebrows, complexion). He concludes that these cannot have had a conventional meaning, because characters otherwise very dissimilar share them, and more emphatically, because often, if one adds up all the different traits on a character’s mask, the image produced is internally inconsistent.

Poe’s qualms about Pollux may not be entirely unjustified, as explained in Chapter 2, but they are certainly overstated: if one does not forget that the Lipari masks are artistic representations and not the theatrical objects themselves, they do correspond with Pollux to a large extent, as Bernabò Brea (1981, 2001) has shown. The odd deviation does not discount the evidential value either of the terracottas themselves or of Pollux.

It is Poe’s second point, which is the main thrust of his argument, that deserves more attention here, namely, the supposed ‘inconsistencies’ produced by reading the masks physiognomically. The dark skin of the tragic *melas* or the comic *episeistos*, a common sign of cowardice, according to physiognomic treatises, is, for Poe, incongruous with the *onkos* of the first, which for him

Aristotle’s example of an *anōmalon ēthos* is Iphigenia in Euripides’ *Iphigenia in Aulis*: the hapless, beseeching girl of the beginning, Aristotle remarks, does not cohere with the strong, resolute Iphigenia of the second part of the play.

implies strength,³ or with the fact that the second is a soldier. Similarly, Poe finds that the curls of the comic *oulos*, which could imply cowardice, cannot square with the raised eyebrows of the same mask, which probably indicate a spirited nature – ergo, physiognomics ‘do not work’ on the mask. Here are some characteristic extracts from Poe’s article:

Too often, the *Physiognomika* do not work. The shaggy black hair of the tragic *panchrēstos* ... for instance, certainly is not intended to convey either spitefulness or sensuality. The *panchrēstos*, moreover, is *melainomenos*, although he probably – since he is also *euchrōs* – is not so dark as to indicate cowardliness. But how are we to interpret the uncompromisingly dark skin of the tragic *melas* ... who is *trachys* in expression and whose high *onkos* is a measure of strength, or of the *episeistos* of comedy, who is a soldier ... and an alazon? The tragic *melas anēr* also has a curly beard and hair, another indication of cowardice, which cannot be a common moral failing of a character represented by this mask. Curls again are found on the *oulos* of comedy, where it is almost as difficult to believe that they were intended to imply cowardice; for the raised eyebrows of this mask ... probably indicate a spirited nature. In the case of his counterpart, the *oulos* of tragedy, there can be no question of cowardice, for that mask’s curls, contradictorily, are also blond, a color which should indicate *eupsychia*, and he is *hyperonkos* and *blosyros to eidōs*.

The first response to such a line of argument is relatively straightforward: one should not disregard the fact that theatrical characters are by their very nature often ambiguous and self-contradictory (which is not the same as inconsistent) – the young men of New Comedy even more so, strategically and axiomatically, as the following sections of this chapter will try to show. The soldier is indeed tough and manly looking, but he is also cowardly. His type relies precisely on this humorous contradiction, which is registered also on the *episeistos* mask and brought forth even more strongly as the soldier interacts with the wily *kolax*.⁴ Young comic lovers, moreover, are indeed ‘spirited’, in that they are relentless and obstinate in their amorous pursuits, but they are also, more often than not, ‘cowardly’, ineffective and in dire need of a slicker collaborator to see their plans to fruition.

We must not pursue a rigid sense of unity, which physiognomics inevitably cannot fulfil; otherwise, we close our eyes to

³ Cf. our discussion of *onkos* in Chapter 2.

⁴ See further on the issue in Chapter 4.

a major function of the mask, namely, its dynamic involvement in the construction of character on the post-classical stage. Look at the following example. The shaggy black hair of the tragic *panchrēstos*, says Poe, ‘certainly is not intended to convey either spitefulness or sensuality’, because, in his understanding, the mask belongs to a daring, powerful, dominant figure.⁵ But be the latter as it may, what if this mask was intended for somebody like Pentheus of Euripides’ *Bacchae*, a character who, theatrically speaking, works precisely thanks to this unstable combination of sensuality and illusion of power? Contradiction and ambiguity may well have been a programmatic goal for, rather than a failure of, the mask-maker. Above all, we cannot plausibly infer that the mask-maker was unaware of the inborn instability of the physiognomic gaze, so vociferously decried in contemporary rhetoric and elsewhere, but so highly advantageous for constructing character by visual means on the theatrical stage. A potentially incoherent and incomplete impression, and the subsequent possibility of misinterpreting the physiognomic object, are integral to the physiognomic experiment, as argued extensively in [Chapter 2](#). The physiognomic gaze may be hampered by dissimulation (the object deliberately concealing its true nature) or simply by the onlooker’s failure to read the signs correctly for a variety of other reasons (see further below). But if in social interaction this is lamentable, even dangerous, on the contrary it is most opportune in the theatre: if physiognomics as a special way of looking at the human form is so laden with anxiety, a ‘contradictory’ mask such as the tragic *melas* or the comic first *episeistos* is an ideal (inter) visual tool for an actor. Again, ‘contradictory’ is not ‘inconsistent’; indeed, being ‘contradictory’ is being precisely *homalōs anōmalon*, producing the necessary conditions for theatrical conflict and reversal.

But in my interpretation the error in this theory is not simply that it wants to eliminate contradiction in a manner that is both

⁵ One would expect such a figure to have *onkos*, especially since this character is also ‘the eldest among the young men’ of tragedy (πρεσβύτατος τῶν νεανίσκων). But here we may bump into one of those noted inconsistencies of the catalogue.

un-Aristotelian and un-theatrical. The way this theory treats physiognomics and Pollux's catalogue is fundamentally flawed for a reason of method: physiognomic features are treated as stand-alone categories rather than as conductors of an overall impression, despite the fact that the Peripatetic author of the *Physiognomonika* specifically cautions against this.

Let us see how Poe deals with another supposedly 'inconsistent' mask, the *presbytēs makropōgōn kai episeiōn* (Pollux, Comic Mask No. 4). This old man is 'sluggish in appearance', but his fine, full beard (*eupōgōn*) is a sign of a hot-tempered disposition. Therefore, Poe believes that once again physiognomics 'does not work' on the mask. Leaving aside the fact that a comic *pappos*, for instance somebody like Demeas or Nikeratos in Menander's *Samia*, can be simultaneously both sluggish (in body and in mind) and quick to irate conflagrations, let us rather look at the structural mistake of isolating the physiognomic signs. The relevant passage in pseudo-Aristotle's *Physiognomonika* deals with the traits of the *thymōdēs* ('spirited', 'passionate') type (*Phgn.* 808a19–24):

θυμώδους σημεῖα. ὀρθὸς τὸ σῶμα, τῷ σχήματι εὐπλευρός, εὐθυμος, ἐπίπυρρος· ὠμοπλάται διεστηκυῖαι καὶ μεγάλαι καὶ πλατεῖαι· ἀκρωτήρια μέγала καὶ ἐγκρατῆ· λεῖος καὶ περὶ τὰ στήθη καὶ περὶ βουβῶνας, εὐπώγων. εὐαυξὴς ὁ περιδρομος τῶν τριχῶν, κάτω κατεληλυθώς.

The following are signs of a passionate man. He is upright in stature, and he has broad ribs, a cheerful countenance, and a ruddy complexion; his shoulder blades are wide, large, and broad; his extremities are big and strong; he is lean both in the chest and in the groin, with a fine, full beard. His hair is considerably grown all round and goes well down.

The author of the *Physiognomonika* here collects a cluster of signs that point to the *thymōdēs* character type (he does so, from *Phgn.* 807a81 onwards, for a number of other classes of *ēthē*, too, such as the *deilos* ('cowardly'), the *euthymos* ('cheerful'), the *athymos* ('spiritless, without passion'), the *euphyēs* ('of good natural disposition'), etc. The relevant principle involved in this physiognomising method⁶ is stated emphatically in *Phgn.* 806b35–807a2.

⁶ This method is different from the one used in the pseudo-Aristotelian treatise until that point, to the extent that some experts believe that a different Peripatetic author wrote the second part of the *Physiognomonika*.

The principle is double: (a) deductions drawn from the most obvious and readily observable characteristics, such as the movement and the overall shape and comportment of the individual, are safer than those drawn from smaller parts of the body (ισχυρότερα δὲ τῶν ἐπὶ τοῖς μέρεσι σημείων ἐστὶ τὰ ἐν τοῖς ἡθέσι τοῖς ἐν τοῖς ἐπιφαινομένοις λαμβανόμενα καὶ τὰ κατὰ τὰς κινήσεις καὶ τὰ σχήματα); and more importantly, (b) it is naive to put stock in single physiognomic signs, as they are useless in isolation; they acquire their semiotic value in association, as they synergise and as they cluster up. Physiognomic readings can be garnered by observing corresponding signs on an individual. This individual may also present deviating signs, but it is acceptable to brush these aside, if the majority of the indications points to a certain direction:

ὅλως δὲ τὸ ἐνὶ μὲν πιστεῦν τῶν σημείων εὐθηδες· ὅταν δὲ πλείω συμφωνοῦντα καθ' ἑνὸς λάβῃ, μάλλον ἤδη κατὰ τὸ εἶκός ἂν τις ὑπολαμβάνῃ ἀληθῆ εἶναι τὰ σημεία.

Generally speaking, it is naive to single out any one of these signs and put all one's complete faith in it; however, when one notices that several of the signs are in agreement in one individual, it would be more reasonable to consider those signs to be true.

After all, the physiognomising that truly matters is part and parcel of social interaction: a quick-paced, almost fleeting engagement in a real-time social situation, not an exact laboratory exercise. Similarly quick-paced, but also interactive, is the act of reading a mask physiognomically on the theatrical stage.

Furthermore, the author of the *Physiognomonika* admits something that must serve as a universal call for caution. There are many ways to physiognomise and these may produce results that contradict each other. Therefore, the physiognomist must be methodologically savvy (to be aware of each method and its limits, and guard against possible failings of his own). At the end of the day, physiognomics is a discipline that deals with signs, that is to say, insinuations, not in any way undeniable or un-falsifiable denotations, of *ēthos*, which are to be either vindicated or disproven in action. In 'real life', as source upon source reveals, physiognomics is a freighted and anxious social enterprise, not a mathematical equation; an ideological and rhetorical weapon rather than a scientific diagnosis, for all its pretending to be as much.

Nothing in fact works better than this on the theatrical stage. It is doubtful whether the mask-maker set off to produce a physiognomically faultless, unified face; in fact, whether there was even general agreement on what would constitute such a face: physiognomics, after all, was never a strictly regulated discipline (much less so in the fourth century BC). Physiognomics is the discernment of clustering indications suggesting an ethical message, often arrived at with the exclusion or the suppression of discordant indications on the same individual. The mask-maker takes advantage of this innate ambiguity to create a theatrical tool, which in collaboration with speech, gesture and movement makes for a dynamic sign on stage. The mask-maker works within a culture that believes profoundly in the utility of physiognomic signs, and he knows that to play with these signs is an excellent way for humour, depth and vitality to accrue on, and thus for new life to be breathed into, character types that are old and perhaps already overused. All in all, the thesis that Pollux's catalogue is imbued with the language of physiognomics simply because 'such ideas were in the air, and the mask makers were unconsciously influenced by them, or because of pure chance' (Poe 1996: 314) cannot carry much conviction. The physiognomic exercise, the anxiety and the instability it entails, must be recognised as an integral element of what we have called the rich texture, the multilayered stratigraphy of Menander's performance.

But let us return to the most significant underlying supposition in Poe's argument, that should the mask have any meaningful visual input, it must contain a set of characteristics harmonised and coordinated between one another, thus evoking a sense of 'total personality' with no internal contradictions or inconsistencies. On the face of it, such a call for unity makes sense and it seems to be Greek in origin. However, its relation with Aristotle's demand for *homalotēs* in characterisation is only illusory, as suggested already. In the following paragraphs I will try to show that it is in fact the upshot of a modern prejudice, which does not relate to any ancient constructions of *ēthos*, much less so to the relevant Aristotelian theories that by general admission inform the idea of character in the comedy of Menander. In reality, the notion of 'total personality'

as the accumulation of small, coalescing ethical peculiarities (the kind of impression that, according to Poe, a physiognomic reading of the New Comedy mask cannot convey, but apparently should have been expected to), is a projection from the Comedy of Manners, a genre whose undeniable generic affinities with Greek New Comedy are liable to obfuscate the peculiarities of the latter.

It would be unfair, of course, to suggest that scholars so far have been blind to the danger of misappropriating the modern genre in New Comedy criticism: in fact, many (from early on) have been battling the idea that Menander wrote an ancient kind of ‘comedy of manners’.⁷ Yet, oddly, the Comedy of Manners often percolates through the critical texts of the self-same scholars who caution against it. It is suggestive to compare the following two passages. Geoffrey Arnott, author of the first one, correctly considers the relationship between Menander and the Comedy of Manners as only indirect;⁸ yet here is how he defines character in Menander in the first volume of his Loeb edition:

[Character in Menander is] the sum of a person’s *idiosyncrasies* in speech and behaviour, an externally viewed set of matching characteristics that slot into a conventional pattern *like the tesserae of a mosaic*.⁹ (my emphasis)

Now let us compare the passage from Arnott above with the following one from the pen of William Congreve (1670–1729),¹⁰ the classic playwright of the Comedy of Manners:

⁷ See, for instance, Post (1934).

⁸ Arnott (1975: 140).

⁹ Arnott (1979: xxxii). In his defence, Arnott cites Keuls (1975) – oddly so, since their respective definitions of *ēthos* do not exactly match. For one, Keuls unambiguously rejects an understanding of *ēthos* as the ‘portrayal of personality by means of characteristic speech patterns and vocabulary’ (Keuls 1975: 198). She opts for a more dynamic perception notion of *ēthos* in drama, which ‘entailed the variation of personal expression according to action’ (Keuls 1975: 195), ‘a skill in varying the moods and speech patterns of the characters under the impact of the action at hand’ (Keuls 1978: 99). Keuls, if only inconclusively, raises the issue of the relationship between *ēthos* in art and *ēthos* in literature. For Keuls, painting combines ‘the static notion of “inherent character” and the dramatic sense of “temporary expression induced by the action”’ (Keuls 1978: 102). In drama, the ‘temporary expression’ is given by action-specific language: *ēthos*, for Keuls, is that language. The danger is to confuse *ēthos* with *pathos*, ‘emotion’, a mistake frequently made in post-classical times (Keuls 1978: 99). Keuls herself does not avoid it, if indeed *πάθος* is ‘the human emotional reaction produced by external circumstances’ (Pollitt 1974: 187). On *pathos* in poetics and rhetoric, see B. R. Rees (1972); Gill (1984); Wisse (1989).

¹⁰ Congreve (1696), reprinted in McMillin (1997: 476).

[Humour, which is the constitution of bodily fluids that conditions human personality, is] a singular and unavoidable manner of doing or saying anything, peculiar and natural to one man only, by which his speech and action are distinguished from those of other men.

The similarities should be obvious enough, since the very notion of idiosyncrasy, which another major New Comedy scholar, T. B. L. Webster, defined as ‘a *mosaic-like* addition of small characteristics’,¹¹ comes directly from the theory of humours, which influenced Restoration Comedy deeply. Congreve, like Arnott, believes that linguistic and behavioural characteristics, being dispositional (they ‘arise from the different constitutions, complexions and dispositions of men’),¹² distinguish sharply one individual from another. Congreve and Arnott also seem to concur in the belief that, in social practice, character-defining idiosyncrasies manifest themselves as a set of ‘external mannerisms or superficiality of style’¹³ (compare Arnott’s ‘externally viewed set of characteristics’). Finally, inasmuch as these external mannerisms introduce the character to the world, Congreve, exactly like Arnott, implies that they summarise, on a first level, a theatrical figure’s ‘total personality’. In the case of New Comedy, according to Arnott, this total personality of the character is served to the audience visually via the mask, ‘provided that the playwright had made [the character] conform to type’.¹⁴

Arnott’s and Webster’s perception of New Comedy character are very similar to, if not directly influenced by, William Congreve’s. Now, as is evident from their mosaic metaphors, Arnott and Webster demand of the mask the same kind of unity as Poe; only Arnott adds the crucial notion of ‘type’, which the character in action may or may not contradict. This theory suggests that the type is something fixed, stable and specific; also, more importantly, that on stage the ‘type’ is identified with the mask, another supposedly fixed semiotic sign. In my view, the theory cannot hold for two reasons.

First, since by ‘type’ the supporters of this theory usually mean such broad categories as the *fallax servus* (‘wily slave’), the *durus*

¹¹ Webster (1974: 44); my emphasis. ¹² Congreve (1696) (in McMillin (1997: 475).

¹³ Hirst (1979: 25). ¹⁴ Arnott (1979: xxxiii).

pater ('strict father') and the *adulescens amans* ('enamoured young man'), the obvious counter is that these categories correspond not to individual mask specimens, but to genera of masks; that is, bigger assemblages, which include a number of variations, even internal groupings (subgenera). The *fallax servus* is not a mask, but a whole group of masks. Very few are the cases in the New Comedy mask system where there is a one-to-one analogy between mask and 'type'; in fact, usually, one such 'type' corresponds to more than one mask. I believe Pollux's catalogue can be trusted in this respect. Even the *miles gloriosus* ('braggart soldier') type, as shown by the *Perikeiromene* mosaic from Antioch,¹⁵ does not correspond only to the first *episeistos*, as Pollux would suggest. As for the cook and the parasite, those other major relics of Middle Comedy, there are at least two options each time: for the cook, the *Maisōn* and the *Tettix*; for the parasite, the *kolax*, the *parasitos* and the more obscure *sikelikos parasitos*. Each of these parasite masks, I shall argue in Chapter 4, results clearly in a different instantiation of 'the type'. Furthermore, the *hetaira* and the slave, both 'types' in theory, are also offered a number of possibilities in the guise of different masks. Above all, the *adulescens amans*, the 'type' that mostly concerns Menander, comes in a very diverse range of masks (as many as seven, possibly eight, if we count the *eikonikos*). The mask positions the character within a group of similar figures with similar characteristics (age, status and mostly structural role, i.e., actant), but the mask is something much more varied than a 'type'. The individual physiognomic differences between the masks within a genus are not mere practicalities (a handy means of distinguishing who is who), but significant theatrical signs.¹⁶

But mask and type cannot, and must not, be confused for a second, wider and even more essential reason. The mask is a concrete theatrical sign, which unfolds its signification on stage, worn by a talking, moving, gesticulating actor. It is never as univocal and predetermined as to be 'stock', because its very

¹⁵ See Chapter 2.

¹⁶ That the mask makes sense by way of difference is a major theoretical premise in mask studies, discussed and exemplified in detail in Chapter 4.

referent, *ēthos*, is never truly fixed either, especially in younger men, as we shall see further down. The ‘type’, on the contrary, is an abstraction, a wider set of narratives converging on a character and carried over into the performance by theatrical memory. The ‘type’ is a set of expectations amassed by experience of previous performances. The mask is not the type. The type is something more vague, theoretical and fluid than the mask, and the mask something more tangible and material than the type.

Of course, there is no question that mask and ‘type’ interplay, that the latter informs the former. I do not reject the idea that Menander’s characters make sense with reference to their generic inheritance, among other things, quite the contrary (remember Gorgias and the *agroikos*).¹⁷ But I do argue that the relation of the mask with this generic inheritance is not to be conceptualised simplistically as a disjunction between *einai* (the character on stage) and *phainesthai* (the ‘type’ identified with the mask). The narratives that constitute the ‘type’ are inevitably implicated in the way the mask’s semiosis plays out in performance, but we need to understand the whole process as something more refined than so far allowed: we need to apply a sophisticated hermeneutics, involving a palpable physical object (the mask); an actor animating that object in real-time, thus turning it into a theatrical sign that exists in association with, not in isolation from, other signs, textual as well as intertextual, visual as well as intervisual; and an audience reading the sign(s) according to a set of generic expectations ushered in by theatrical tradition and personal experience.

Moreover, it may be shown that even this latter traditional idea, which is by no means specific to Arnott, namely, that the mask in Menander acts out a disjunction between *einai* and *phainesthai*, also harks back to the Comedy of Manners. The spearhead of satire in the Comedy of Manners lay exactly in dramatising the peculiarities that make up a person’s idiosyncrasy, in order to strike the balance between individual eccentricity and societal vice. In the Comedy of Manners, that is to say, we experience

¹⁷ Discussed in [Chapter 2](#).

tension between the societal and the humoural analogous to that between 'type' and 'individual', or 'mask' and 'character', which part of modern scholarship saw at play in New Comedy. In the Comedy of Manners, this tension is often externalised, to the gallant's damnation, as 'the constant revelation of a gap between reality and appearance, between selfish motive and smooth professions of cordiality',¹⁸ as the beau manipulates social convention to further his amorous pursuits. Vice permeates the inner self as much as it conceals itself behind the thick crust of gentlemanly hypocrisy that dictates 'good manners'. The rake disguises with witty turns of phrase a kernel of lust and deceit.¹⁹ On the contrary, we are told, in New Comedy, whose intent is 'humanistic' (*philanthrōpon*) rather than cynical and sarcastic, this tension between *einai* and *phainesthai* is a tension between the individual and his 'mask', which is often taken to represent the stock elements with which the character is encumbered due to his or her theatrical ancestry. The character (the soldier, for instance) is eventually elevated morally, as he shakes off the burden of a disfiguring tradition. As Ferrari puts it, Menander's characters often 'negate' their mask ('*maschera negata*') or 'strip it naked' ('*maschera nudata*').²⁰

Ferrari may be turning the tables in favour of Menander (New Comedy humanises its subjects rather than condemning them), but he is obviously using an interpretive framework that understands the mask as something as external as the hypocritical *savoir vivre* of Restoration comedy. Theories like Ferrari's, as much as they may appear to be working for characters like Stratophanes of the

¹⁸ Hirst (1979: 10).

¹⁹ Of course, the dichotomy between humour and wit, nature and culture, is never so clear-cut in the Comedy of Manners: disposition and affectation frequently converge, to the effect that, as Congreve himself put it, 'wit is often mistaken for Humour' (Congreve 1696 (in McMillin 1997: 474)). Among the coxcombs frequenting the parlours of, say, Wycherley or Farquhar, *einai* is absorbed by *phainesthai*: buried under a mountain of dissemblance, humour as natural predisposition becomes indistinguishable from what is essentially a set of acquired social skills. In a society judging and judged at the surface, wit becomes a mask in itself, directly akin to those 'masks' that vouchsafe the decency of fine ladies when they roam the streets in search of illicit erotic gratification. What renders an individual distinctly unique, that is, 'humour' or 'character', degenerates into a manner of comportment and a language shared by a homosocial circle of peers.

²⁰ Ferrari (1996).

Sikyonioi, who is indeed very different from the average *miles gloriosus*, run aground when they metaphorise the mask too much, transforming it uncomfortably from a concrete sign to an abstract idea (the slip may be abetted by the fact that ‘*maschera*’ in Italian means both ‘mask’ and ‘stock character’). They are also problematic in that they treat the mask as well-nigh antagonistic to true character (a *problēma tou tropou* almost, like the dissimulations of Demosthenes’ opponent we referred to in [Chapter 2](#)), rather than as a means of constructing *ēthos* on the Menandrian stage. We have already seen that in cases like Gorgias’ in the *Dyskolos*, the mask is involved in a sophisticated game of contrasting the visual and the verbal signification of the character in an ironical, even humorous fashion. The way theatrical tradition (the stock figure and the mask of the *agroikos*) is incarnated in this character brings to the foreground themes and motifs integral to the interpretation of the play (namely, the ‘displacement’ of Gorgias, who is en route to becoming a Knemon). The theatrical mask is a means of revelation, not of concealment.

Back to the Greeks

To understand character as the idiosyncrasy of a person is alien to the Greek, indeed the Aristotelian, idea of *ēthos*, for two reasons: (a) because it concentrates on the particular, whereas Aristotle, much like the ‘science’ of physiognomics, focused on a generic proclivity to virtue or vice; and (b) because it smuggles into ancient Comedy a philosophical construct, the Individual, whose existence in the history of ideas is highly questionable before Descartes (1596–1650).²¹ Approaching New Comedy via the Comedy of Manners is to look at it through profoundly un-Greek eyes. We need to establish conceptual filters relevant to the age of Menander in general and to the art of the New Comedy mask-maker in particular. Specifically, it is fundamental to grasp the Aristotelian concepts of *ēthos*, *prohairesis* and *praxis*, if we are to

²¹ Cf. Gill (1996: esp. 1–18, 34–7). On a comparison between post-Cartesian and ante-Cartesian (including Greek) ethics and philosophy of mind, cf. MacIntyre (1985); Williams (1985).

understand the central role played by the mask as a visual sign in the articulation of Menandrian performance; if we are to appreciate, that is, the subtle interplay between mask, character and action on Menander's stage.

This, of course, requires caution. Even in the most savvy of scholars one can find potentially misleading declarations about these cardinal concepts. Here is an example. The mask, writes David Wiles, denotes *ēthos*, that is, 'a constant, a fixed moral disposition to undertake action *x* rather than action *y* in a given situation'.²² It is understandable why the notion of 'fixedness' offered itself for alluring analogies with the mask. All the same, it assigns a sense of rigid finality and predictability to moral disposition, which is un-Aristotelian and doubly unhelpful: first, because, as we shall see, Aristotle gives *ēthos* much greater dynamism than the concept of 'fixedness' permits; and secondly, because this sense of constancy in moral disposition applies even less to the genus of masks at the core of New Comedy, namely, the masks of young men.

In order to return to Greek ethical blueprints we also need to deconstruct some ossified preconceptions of ours. If, for instance, one approaches character in Greek drama from the modern standpoint of a Western, Christian, psychological/individualist, non-masked tradition of theatre,²³ one immediately stumbles upon a challenging passage in Aristotle's *Poetics* (*Poet.* 1450a20–6). The passage postulates a firm and unqualified priority of action (*praxis*) over *ēthos* – the term we most often render as 'character' – so much so that certain tragedies, especially those written in Aristotle's own time (*tōn neōn*), can even be 'characterless' (*aētheis*):²⁴

²² Wiles (1991: 24).

²³ For the split between modern and ancient spectator sensibilities, with special reference to the perception of character, the classic reference is Gould (1978). Gould's insights were elaborated, most notably, by Gill (1986); Damen (1989); Easterling (1990); Goldhill (1990); Budelmann (2000: 61–91). Recently, Budelmann and Easterling (2010) attempted to re-examine the ancient notion of character from the viewpoint of cognitive theory.

²⁴ 'Characterless' was Else's rendition (Else 1957: 252). Bywater (1909: 167) translates 'characterless', but takes *aētheis* to mean 'deficient in character' (cf. 1460a32: ἀμιμήτως ἔγραψεν) rather than 'devoid of character'. D. W. Lucas (1968: 103) preferred 'devoid

οὐκ οὖν ὅπως τὰ ἥθη μιμήσονται πράττουσιν, ἀλλὰ τὰ ἥθη συμπεριλαμβάνουσιν διὰ τὰς πράξεις· ὥστε τὰ πράγματα καὶ ὁ μῦθος τέλος τῆς τραγωδίας, τὸ δὲ τέλος μέγιστον ἀπάντων. ἔτι ἄνευ μὲν πράξεως οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο τραγωδία, ἄνευ δὲ ἡθῶν γένοιτ' ἂν· αἱ γὰρ τῶν νέων τῶν πλείστων ἀήθεις τραγωδαί εἰσιν.

Therefore action is not represented in order to produce a mimesis of character (*ēthos*), but the characters are included for the sake of the actions. So the goal of tragedy is the events and the plot, and the goal is the most significant thing of all. Furthermore, although it is not possible to have tragedies without action, there can be tragedies without *ēthos*. Most modern tragedies in fact are devoid of *ēthos*.

Aristotle's statement has confounded many scholars,²⁵ even more so, understandably, scholars of New Comedy, for whom it rings counter-intuitive. In New Comedy iconography, an assortment of masks (i.e., of 'typical characters'), for instance, that on the well-known Kavalla relief, could signify 'comic play'. Many New Comedy plays, furthermore, share their titles with Theophrastus' sketches (*Agroikos*, *Apistos*, *Deisidaimōn*, *Kolax*, etc.), as if the plays themselves are little more than theatrical essays on those particular character types. Must it not have been, then, that the significance of *ēthos* relative to *praxis* was far greater than Aristotle had conceded – in New Comedy performance at least, if not in tragedy?²⁶

The answer, of course, is negative, but it requires that one understands *ēthos* and *praxis* in Aristotelian terms. In Aristotle, *ēthos* means both 'character' and 'characterisation'. Action as a component of drama is clearly prior to 'characterisation', the explicit presentation of character mainly through *rhēseis ēthikai*. However, 'character' and action are intertwined, because: (a) 'character' for Aristotle is a disposition to action; and (b) vice versa, action forms habit (*hexis*, *synētheia*) and habit forms *ēthos*.

of character interest'. A more accurate translation, of course, would be 'devoid of or inadequate in characterisation'; see below.

²⁵ Cf. the baffled words of F. L. Lucas (1957: 140): 'One may wonder, however, how a philosopher who thought the highest life was that of contemplative mental activity could so prefer action to character in this somewhat behaviourist view of drama.' A few pages above, Lucas had characterised Aristotle's justification of this 'behaviourism' as 'not quite worthy of a philosopher' (F. L. Lucas 1957: 137).

²⁶ Often the assumption is that *ēthos* atones for Menander's dreary plots, cf. Keuls (1975: 195).

Aristotelian *ēthos*, therefore, may be ‘permanent’ in the sense that it is accountable and observable in any given situation; yet, being the effect of interaction between physical endowment (*dynamis*) and acquired habit (*hexis*), and varying with age, condition and circumstance,²⁷ *ēthos* is renegotiated at every instance of moral choice. Far from ever being ‘fixed’, *ēthos* is persistently subject to being redefined in action: it is both the producer and the product of choice in an ongoing process.

I shall elaborate on these concepts in the next section, to grasp this Aristotelian oxymoron which is so central in the comedy of Menander: that a Greek comedy depicting character has to prioritise action by necessity; and that a mask that denotes *ēthos* is directly engaged not with ‘idiosyncrasy’, but with moral choice (*prohairesis*) in the face of clearly defined alternatives. The whole issue becomes even more enthralling in the light of the aforementioned paradox that young men in particular, our principal concern in this chapter, constitute a category of moral agent whose *ēthos*, again according to Peripatetic standards, is still unconsolidated, whose proairetic faculties are immature and unstable.²⁸ The flexibility and the fluidity rather than the fixedness of youthful *ēthos* is a leitmotif of Aristotelian philosophy: youthful *ēthos* is just the seed and the trace of its future adult self.²⁹ At the epicentre of the action in New Comedy, therefore, are characters whose allegiance to ‘virtue’ (an idea predicated politically as well as ethically) is heavily compromised by the irrational, animalistic forces that inside them still reign supreme; who are prone to *akrasia* (lack of self-discipline) and whose moral behaviour is

²⁷ The *locus classicus* is *Rh.* 1388b31–1390b8. On Aristotle’s *eudaimonia* being liable to external circumstances, which may have permanent traces on *ēthos*, cf. Nussbaum (1986) 307–9, 318ff., and esp. 336–40, with a discussion of the passage from the *Rhetoric*.

²⁸ *Eth. Eud.* 1226b21: ‘hence moral choice cannot be found in the other animals, not in humans of every age’ (διὸ οὐτε ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις ζώοις ἐστὶν ἡ προαίρεσις, οὐτε ἐν πάσῃ ἡλικίᾳ).

²⁹ *Hist. An.* 588a31–588b3: ‘This is most evident if we turn our eyes to children. In these one can detect the traces and the seeds, as it were, of what later will become habit. One could say that at this age the soul is no different than the soul of animals’ (φανερώτατον δ’ ἐστὶ τὸ τοιοῦτον ἐπὶ τὴν τῶν παιδῶν ἡλικίαν βλέψασιν· ἐν τούτοις γὰρ τῶν μὲν ὑστερον ἔξεων ἐσομένων ἔστιν ἰδεῖν οἷον ἔχνη καὶ σπέρματα. διαφέρει δ’ οὐδὲν ὡς εἰπεῖν ἡ ψυχὴ τῆς τῶν θηρίων ψυχῆς κατὰ τὸν χρόνον τοῦτον).

contradictory as a rule. Obviously, by generic imperative, the fluctuation between virtue and vice in the behaviour of young men (of young New Comedy lovers) may be dramatic and violent, but it is not irreparably damnatory – because Tyche works its magic. The young men of New Comedy are still morally in abeyance, akratic enough to generate the crisis in the plot, but at the same time citizen souls in formation, salvaged and uplifted in the end.

Ēthos (ἦθος) and action in Aristotle

Part of the reason, then, why so much confusion has been caused by the dictum ‘portray character for the sake of action’ (ἦθη διὰ τὰς πράξεις) is the fact that Aristotle’s notion of *ēthos* in the *Poetics* is dual, denoting properties that pertain to human beings (‘character’), and/or to works of literature (‘characterisation’).³⁰ For Aristotle, ‘characterisation’ is not simply ‘character-drawing’, but, more concretely, the explicit manifestation of an agent’s *prohairesis* (‘purposive choice’ or ‘moral commitment to action’)³¹ and its moral qualities (that the action is *poia tis*), by way of word or deed (ἔστιν δὲ ἦθος μὲν τὸ τοιοῦτον ὃ δηλοῖ τὴν προαίρεσιν, *Poet.* 1450b8). When Aristotle acknowledges the possibility of *aētheis tragōidiai*, or indeed *aēthēs graphē* (tragedies or painting without *ēthos*), such as that of Zeuxis in contrast to that of Polygnotus, he is referring to the absence not of ‘character’, but of this overt and unmistakable demonstration of the dispositional origins of *praxis*.³² *Praxis* and *mythos*³³ are superior to ‘characterisation’ as components of drama (although Aristotle is

³⁰ Cf. Halliwell (1986: 138ff.); Belfiore (1992: 92ff.). Pace Else (1957: 456–7), *ēthos* in the *Poetics* does not mean ‘*dramatis persona*’, as might be implied by *Poet.* 1454a28–32, 1460a10–1; cf. Belfiore (1992: 95ff.).

³¹ ‘Purposive choice’ was Kenny’s translation (Kenny 1979: 69, n. 1). Chamberlain’s ‘moral commitment’ is more explicit in stressing the procedural character of *prohairesis* (Chamberlain 1984). Charles’ ‘preferential choice’ is also successful in this respect (Charles 1984: 137–42).

³² On Aristotle and painting, see Ciarletta (1976); Zanker (2000). I cannot accept Zanker’s view that ἠθικός as an attribute of Polygnotus’ painting means ‘morally uplifting’ (232).

³³ For the relation between *mythos* (‘plot’) and *praxis* (‘action’, object of *mythos*) in the *Poetics*, cf. Belfiore (1983).

clearly loath to see tragedies dispose of *ēthos* altogether in this sense), but the relation of action to ‘character’ is more dialectic.

Even *ēthos* as ‘character’ retains a certain degree of duality in the *Poetics*, as it conflates properties that Aristotle had allocated to different parts of the soul in his ethical works.³⁴ In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, *ēthos* and the *ēthikai aretai*, moral virtues, were unequivocally opposed to *dianoia* and the *dianoētikai aretai* (*Eth. Nic.* 1103a13–1103b25), intellectual virtues. The *ēthikai aretai*, which dwell in us by nature, but also result from habit, belong to the *alolon* part of the soul. *Ēthos* in the *Ethics* is the ‘non-intellectual part of our inner being’,³⁵ those unfeigned inner dispositions dictating spontaneous direction towards virtue or vice, before the intervention of reason (*logos*) and calculation (*logismos*).³⁶ In the *Poetics*, on the contrary, this firm distinction between *ēthos* and *dianoia* is only sustained with reference to parts of the drama, not the *dramatis personae*. As an aspect of ‘character’, *ēthos*, which ideally should be *chrēston*, requires at least one intellectual quality: *phronēsis*.³⁷ In the *Poetics*, *ēthos* and *dianoia* are collocated parts of the (dramatic) soul,³⁸ as they are distinct *kata poion merē* (parts that determine the quality) of drama.³⁹ The requirement of dramatic unity, the fact that tragedy pursues *to katholou*, as well as an explicit polemic against Plato,⁴⁰ demand a clear pecking order between *mythos* and *ēthos* or

³⁴ This point is contested, but the above notion prevails among scholars. In favour of the idea that the intellectual and the non-intellectual to some degree converge in the *ēthos* of the *Poetics*, one could cite (selectively): Verdenius (1945); Held (1985); Blundell (1992). *Contra*: Schütrumpf (1970), (1987), who argues that the conceptual distinction between moral (*ēthos*) and intellectual (*dianoia*) is as clean in the *Poetics* as it is in the *Ethics*.

³⁵ Verdenius (1945: 244).

³⁶ Cf. *Eth. Nic.* 1117a17–22 (where the opposition is *hexis* / *logismos*, and *Rhet.* 1389b13ff. (*ēthos* / *logismos*)).

³⁷ Blundell (1992: 161).

³⁸ Blundell (1992: 165): ‘For representational purposes ... the saying and the doing are aspects of [the dramatic] *ēthos*.’

³⁹ Cf. Dale (1969: 139–55).

⁴⁰ See Belfiore (1992: 85–7). The relevant Platonic passage is *Resp.* 603c4–7. Plato’s insistence that the mimetic arts imitate ἡθῆ is, first and foremost, an argumentative ploy: if the mimetic arts imitate ἡθῆ and those ἡθῆ are base, then the mimetic arts are base themselves, and thus they should be barred from the ideal state.

dianoia, the universal action as paradigm and the incidental actor as exemplary agent.

However, for all the priority of *praxis* over *ēthos* as ‘characterisation’, action and *ēthos* as ‘disposition to action’ are not only interconnected, but reciprocal. In his ethical writings, Aristotle posits character as the cause of action (αἴτια . . . τῶν πράξεων, *Poet.* 1450a1–2),⁴¹ and, simultaneously, action as formative of character. For Aristotle, as much as for Theophrastus, who systematically portrays his ‘characters’ by means of a series of defining actions (the *toioutos* . . . *hoios* formula) providing, in a sense, a ‘physiognomics’ of social behaviour, ‘character’ is the aggregate of moral qualities conferred upon man by his social activity – with the proviso that this activity is the result of conscious choice: it is the agent that carries the moral qualification more than the activity itself.⁴² Action is the privileged interface for judging ‘character’, because it is the sole space in which character is truly opened up to observation and analysis, cf. *Mag. Mor.* 1190b1–6:

οἱ γὰρ ἄλλοι ἀνθρώποι τὸν σπουδαῖον θεωροῦντες κρίνουσιν ἐκ τοῦ πράττειν, διὰ τὸ μὴ δυνατόν εἶναι δηλῶσαι τὴν ἐκάστου προαίρεσιν ἣν ἔχει· ἐπεὶ εἰ ἦν εἰδέναι τὴν ἐκάστου γνώμην, ὥς ἔχει πρὸς τὸ καλόν, καὶ ἀνευ τοῦ πράττειν σπουδαῖος ἂν ἐδόκει εἶναι.

For other people judge if one is good based on one’s actions, since it is not possible otherwise to indicate one’s moral purpose. Because if one could know the character of each person, what is their stance as regards the good, this person could be considered good even without looking at their actions.

⁴¹ Most editors bracket these lines, but this should not detract much from our argument here. Elsewhere, e.g., in *Eth. Nic.* 1114b23, Aristotle asserts that man is only ‘in some way the co-determinant’ (συναίτιος πῶς) of his own actions with φύσις (‘nature’) as his partner. To this φύσις one should add, when it comes to drama, *moira* (fate) and *tychē*.

⁴² Cf. *Eth. Nic.* 1105a29–31: ‘Actions done according to the various forms of virtue are not considered just or temperate only if the actions themselves are so and so, but with reference to the agent’s stance, too: first if he acted knowingly, then if he exercised moral choice and if his moral choice concerned the actions for their own sake, and third if he acted in a steadfast and unwavering manner’ (τὰ δὲ κατὰ τὰς ἀρετὰς γινόμενα οὐκ ἔαν αὐτὰ πῶς ἔξη, δικαίως ἢ σωφρόνως πράττεται, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἔαν ὁ πράττων πῶς ἔχων πράττῃ, πρῶτον μὲν ἔαν εἰδῶς, ἔπειτ’ ἔαν προαιρούμενος, καὶ προαιρούμενος δι’ αὐτὰ, τὸ δὲ τρίτον ἔαν καὶ βεβαίως καὶ ἀμετακινήτως ἔχων πράττῃ. See Belfiore (1983). What is at stake with the Youth above all is this the βεβαίως καὶ ἀμετακινήτως: see the discussion of Terence’s *Eunuchus* below.

More crucially, action is where *ēthos*, as the aggregate of natural disposition (*dynamis*) and developed habits, ultimately takes shape.⁴³ There is, of course, such a thing as a ‘natural virtue’ in Aristotle (*Eth. Nic.* 1144b1–1145b11), which can be the property of animals and undeveloped humans; but the virtue of the adult, the *kyria aretē*, cannot exist independent of *phronēsis*, that is, wisdom acquired in action (*Eth. Nic.* 1144b17). *Ēthos* belongs as much to the domain of nature as to the realm of habit (*hexis* or *ἕθος*). The latter is a series of performed actions that leave traces on the disposition and predetermine future action, especially at a young age. Vitally, this is a process of *teleiousthai* (achieving its *telos*, its mature state), which plays a decisive role in the formation of the adult, cf. *Eth. Nic.* 1103a24–1103b25:

Οὐτ’ ἄρα φύσει οὕτε παρὰ φύσιν ἐγγίνονται αἱ ἀρεταί, ἀλλὰ πεφυκόσιν μὲν ἡμῖν δέξασθαι αὐτάς, τελειουμένοις δὲ διὰ τοῦ ἔθους. ἔτι ὅσα μὲν φύσει ἡμῖν παραγίνεται, τὰς δυνάμεις τούτων πρότερον κομιζόμεθα, ὕστερον δὲ τὰς ἐνεργείας ἀποδίδομεν . . . διὸ δεῖ τὰς ἐνεργείας ποιᾶς ἀποδιδόναι· κατὰ γὰρ τὰς τούτων διαφορὰς ἀκολουθοῦσιν αἱ ἐξεις. οὐ μικρὸν οὖν διαφέρει τὸ οὕτως ἢ οὕτως εὐθύς ἐκ νέων ἐθίζεσθαι, ἀλλὰ πάμπολυ, μᾶλλον δὲ τὸ πᾶν.

Virtues are not inherent in human beings by nature or established contrary to nature. Nature predisposes us to develop them, and habit makes them develop and mature. Furthermore, whatever faculties we have by nature, first we are given the potential for them and then we exercise them in practice . . . Hence we need to act according to certain moral standards, because upon those moral standards depends the habit that we are going to develop. It makes no small difference to grow accustomed to behaving this way or the other from a young age. The difference is great, in fact this is everything.

Virtue for Aristotle, therefore, is a natural disposition developed by habit, the kind of performance⁴⁴ that necessarily involves conscious rational deliberation (*Eth. Nic.* 1105a17ff.). Aristotle’s

⁴³ Cf. also Plutarch, *Virt. Mor.* 443c5ff. (whose Aristotelian provenance is clear, cf. *Eth. Nic.* 1105b19ff.): ‘The word *ēthos* is aptly given to this concept. Because, generally speaking, *ēthos* is a quality of the irrational part of the soul, and it is called *ēthos* because the irrational part of the soul develops this quality by habit (*ethos*) as it is shaped by reason’ (διὸ καὶ καλῶς ὠνόμασται τὸ ἔθος. ἔστι μὲν γάρ, ὡς τύπω εἰπεῖν, ποιότης τοῦ ἀλόγου τὸ ἔθος, ὠνόμασται δ’ ὅτι τὴν ποιότητα ταύτην καὶ τὴν διαφορὰν ἔθει λαμβάνει τὸ ἄλογον ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου πλαττόμενον).

⁴⁴ Cf. *Eth. Nic.* 1103b1–2: ‘We become just by acting justly, temperate by acting temperately, and brave by acting bravely’ (τὰ μὲν δίκαια πράττοντες δίκαιοι γινόμεθα, τὰ δὲ σώφρονα σώφρονες, τὰ δ’ ἀνδρεῖα ἀνδρεῖοι).

theory is not behaviourist, of course; in fact, Aristotle, too, employs a line of argument against behavioural accounts similar to that in Plato's *Laches* and *Charmides*:⁴⁵ Virtue, Socrates goes, cannot simply coincide with 'a readily observable pattern of action',⁴⁶ but should necessarily entail the knowledge of the Good. Likewise, for Aristotle Virtue is not simply *hexis* (*Eth. Nic.* 1105b19–1106a13), but, ultimately, *hexis proairetikē* (*Eth. Nic.* 1139a17–27), the acquired capacity to master by way of reason our natural proclivity to emotion (*pathos*),⁴⁷ a practical training in exercising virtuous choice, cf. *Eth. Nic.* 1103a31–3: 'we develop the virtues by acting accordingly ... The things we have to learn and do we learn by doing' (τὰς δ' ἀρετὰς λαμβάνομεν ἐνεργήσαντες πρότερον ... ἃ γὰρ δεῖ μαθόντας ποιεῖν, ταῦτα ποιοῦντες μανθάνομεν).

Interesting in this respect, and perhaps an indication that the mask-maker understood the interlocking of *dynamis* and *hexis*, is that the New Comedy mask represents not only static, immutable signifiers, such as hair colour or facial traits, but it also 'freezes' dynamic, mutable markers of disposition, such as the elevation of the brows or the movement of the forehead. This is not a 'dead convention', if any could be, or a casual ingredient of the mask-maker's stock-in-trade. From a theatrical point of view, it enhances the emotional gamut of the mask. One could counter that such 'freezing' of mutable elements is illusory and immaterial if a competent actor in performance can automatically 'remobilise' those features⁴⁸ through skilful movement and the appropriate exposure of the mask to light and shade. Nevertheless, as a signifier, the combination of mutable and immutable facial traits on the mask may bespeak an intimate understanding, on the part of the mask-maker, of Aristotle's non-deterministic notion of *ēthos* as an evolutionary state inexorably associated with practical

⁴⁵ For full analysis and references, see Irwin (1977: 43–7). ⁴⁶ Irwin (1977: 44).

⁴⁷ On the role of emotion in Aristotle's bipartite psychology, cf. Fortenbaugh (1969); Sherman (1989: 44ff.).

⁴⁸ Pseudolus' 'twitching' eyebrow (*Pseud.* 107) has been a famous cause of scandal in this respect, inasmuch as it led a number of scholars, including Slater (1985: 121), to surmise that it is at least conceivable that Pseudolus' mask – if indeed, some wondered, Pseudolus is wearing a mask at all – may have had a mechanical eyebrow.

activity. The New Comedy mask-maker seems aware that habit is 'second nature'.⁴⁹ Traits developed in habitual action are embedded in the moral agent (in the immature young all the more so). Eventually, they become indistinguishable from dispositional tendencies inherited by nature. It may be true, strictly speaking, that it is the body and the voice of the actor that mostly convey emotion in Greek performance, but the mask does share in emotion as it incorporates habit into *ēthos*. Habit, at the end of the day, is the way one manages *pathos*.⁵⁰

Despite Aristotle's complaint about the characterless-ness of his contemporary tragedies, or 'most of them', there is evidence from both the plastic arts⁵¹ and oratory of a mounting fourth-century interest in representing *ēthos* (*ēthopoia*) that went hand in hand with the politics of the gaze in a developing 'culture of viewing'.⁵² It is because of this politicisation of the gaze that in oratory at least the representation of *ēthos* took centre stage as a form of argumentation.⁵³ As early as Xenophon, *Mem.* 3.10 (the famous exchange between Socrates and the painter Parrhasios on the representation of 'the moral disposition of the soul'), we can see that the ultimate purpose of this incisive research into 'how to render the invisible visible'⁵⁴ will be the evaluation and the prognosis of action (physiognomics, as mentioned, is a form of social pre-emption). A statue of Alexander by Lysippus⁵⁵ as much as a 'character sketch' of Philip by Demosthenes sought to materialise the dispositional determinants of behaviour and the reciprocal causality linking action with the structure of the soul and vice versa, in order, eventually, to re-evaluate the agent's place within the society of men. Xenophonic Socrates' insistence that the representation of *ēthos* should eventually prescribe political courses of action illustrates plainly the sort of discourse we find

⁴⁹ Aesop, *Prov.* 23, Perry: 'habit is second nature' (δευτέρα φύσις συνήθεια).

⁵⁰ Cf. *Eth. Nic.* 1105b25–8: 'the habits are the way we are disposed towards our emotions, if we are well-disposed or ill-disposed, for instance, towards anger, that is, if we get violently angry or mildly or in a moderate way' (ἐξεις δὲ καθ' ὅς πρὸς τὰ πάθη ἔχομεν εὖ ἢ κακῶς, οἷον πρὸς τὸ ὀργισθῆναι, εἰ μὲν σφοδρῶς ἢ ἀναιμμένως, κακῶς ἔχομεν, εἰ δὲ μέσως, εὖ).

⁵¹ Cf. Pfuhl (1988); Studniczka (1988); Rouveret (1989: 133–61). ⁵² Goldhill (1998).

⁵³ On *ēthopoia* in oratory and in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and its divergence from the discourse in the *Poetics*, see Pearson (1968).

⁵⁴ Rouveret (1989: 133), quoted by Goldhill (1998: 110). ⁵⁵ See Kiilerich (1988).

at play in Aristotle. We have to remember that in the variant definitions of *aretē* in classical Greek culture, virtue is, in most cases,⁵⁶ political in the proper sense of the word: virtue is the evolutionary product of social engagement (ἐν τοῖς συναλλάγμασι τοῖς πρὸς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, *Eth. Nic.* 1103b14–15), evidently in a polis context; ethics, after all, belongs to the purview of ‘political science’ (*Eth. Nic.* 1094a1ff., 1095a17ff.).⁵⁷ There is nothing inherently surprising if a competitive performance culture such as the Athenian retains a constant focus on action as a structuring principle of morality. If you are Greek, and indeed Athenian, what you are is essentially what you do, and what you do is, or should be, co-extensive with how you look. Exceptional cases like Socrates may expose the limitations and the tensions involved in such discourse, but their very exceptionality is evocative of the cultural norm.

The semiotised New Comedy mask, then, denotes *ēthos*. This *ēthos* is not ‘character’ in either the modern psychological sense or that of ‘total personality’: *ēthos* is a constituent of action. The mask is a foregrounded sign in New Comedy performance not because this genre is concerned with ‘manners’ in any way, but because the physiognomised mask visualises the empathy between body and soul, and thereby between the structure of the soul, the behaviour of the citizen, and the wellbeing of the polis. In addition to imitating a face, the New Comedy mask involves φαντασία, as well (‘imagination’ as well as ‘conceptualisation’),⁵⁸ the artistic capacity of representing the ‘what is not visible’ (Xen. *Mem.* 3.10). Once again, therefore, from a different conduit this time, we can see how powerful an (inter)visual sign Menander’s mask is. For had Aristotle not turned a blind eye to *opsis*, he would have seen that the semiotics of moral agency, with its

⁵⁶ Aristotelian contemplative virtue, and perhaps also Epicurean virtue, might have to be exempted.

⁵⁷ For the position of Platonic Socrates on the ‘value of virtue’, cf. Irwin (1977: 92ff., esp. 94): ‘Socrates has no reason to claim that being a virtuous man or acting for a virtuous man’s reasons and motives has any value apart from efficiency in action.’ Cf. also Gould (1955: 13): ‘Even for Socrates and Plato, to achieve *aretē* is not to arrive at a valid ethical theory, but to attain valid moral behaviour.’

⁵⁸ Cf. Rouveret (1989: 133).

reflexive impingement on the ideology of the state, is superimposed on the visual as well as on the linguistic level of New Comedy performance.

Aristotle's notion of *prohairesis* and the genus of young men in New Comedy

There is still, however, one further step to take in order to understand fully the visual input of the mask in the construction of character in New Comedy. It is pivotal to establish also that looking at the mask and its physiognomy Greek audiences saw a field of action organised as a range of moral alternatives. This range of alternatives became available to the agent at the defining juncture Aristotle calls *prohairesis*. This concept is vital for the genus of masks that so scandalised Poe with their physiognomic 'inconsistencies': young men.

According to Charles,⁵⁹ *prohairesis* is the 'unique state which immediately precedes action, and is the acceptance of the conclusion of the agent's completed deliberation'.⁶⁰ The deliberative nature of *προ-αἵρεσις* is etymologically transparent, cf. *Eth. Eud.* 1226b7–8: 'moral choice is selection, but not just simply; it is to choose one thing over another' (ἡ γὰρ προαἵρεσις αἵρεσις μὲν ἐστίν, οὐχ ἀπλῶς δέ, ἀλλ' ἐτέρου πρὸ ἐτέρου). *Prohairesis* is not simply a voluntary (*hekousion*), desirous (*epithymia*) or intentional (*boulēsis*) action; it is a rational decision. It is not, however, an intellectual opinion (*doxa*) that can be 'correct' or 'mistaken': it is about virtue and vice, and it deals with purposes (*telē*) within the human potential (τὰ ἐφ' ἡμῖν, *Eth. Nic.* 1111b32–3).⁶¹ In fact, *προαἵρεσις* is what renders an act a proper *praxis*, since not all

⁵⁹ Charles (1984: 137). Cf. also Charles (1984: 139): 'Preferential choice [= προαἵρεσις] is described as a proximate cause of πράξις (*Eth. Nic.* 1139a31) and of action more generally ... Since the proximate efficient cause is simultaneous with the effect – in the sense that nothing intervenes between them (243a33–34) – there can be no further stages of deliberation which intervene between the preferential choice and the πράξις.'

⁶⁰ The Corpus Aristotelicum contains three largely overlapping discussions of προαἵρεσις, one in each ethical treatise: *Eth. Nic.* 1111b4–1112a17; *Eth. Eud.* 1225b18–1227b12; *Mag. Mor.* 1190a28–b10.

⁶¹ *Eth. Nic.* 1111b33–4: 'opinions are false or true, not vicious or virtuous. But these are the qualities whereby moral choices are distinguished' ([ἡ δόξα] τῷ ψευδεῖ καὶ ἀληθεῖ διαίρεται, οὐ τῷ κακῷ καὶ ἀγαθῷ, ἡ προαἵρεσις δὲ τούτοις μᾶλλον).

actions are *praxeis*. Animals have sensation (*aisthēsis*), but lack *prohairesis*, and children have to *hekousion* and *hairesis* but not *prohairesis* (*Eth. Nic.* 1111b8–9). Animals and children do not share in *praxis*.⁶² Eventually, *prohairesis* is the prerogative of the adult male.

Above all, *prohairesis* is a process: it is ‘the desire to do an action, the decision to do an action, and the initiation of an action’.⁶³ Via this process the whims of desire get in line with the mandates of reason, establishing harmony between the rational and the irrational parts of the soul.⁶⁴ The moral agent acts *kata prohairesin* when reason and desire concur. Acting *kata prohairesin* is the hallmark of practical reason (*phronēsis*). *Prohairesis*, however, is not the exclusive property of the virtuous; it pertains just as much to the vicious (*Eth. Nic.* 1112a1–2: τῷ γὰρ προαιρεῖσθαι τὰγαθὰ ἢ τὰ κακὰ ποιοῖ τινές ἐσμεν).⁶⁵ The wanton is just as proairetic in his actions⁶⁶ as the self-restrained: the latter opts for containing his desires within the confines of propriety; the former pursues the maximum of pleasure, which he designates as τέλος. *Prohairesis* is an ‘orientation’ of social behaviour towards good or evil dictated by perception (*aisthēsis*) and desire (*boulēsis*), and ultimately dependent upon *ēthos*. *Prohairesis* is the moral mechanism that sees to the achievement of an action’s set *telos*.⁶⁷ *Prohairesis* accepts a moment of conflict and wavering as reason reins in desire, but this conflict is momentary and serves only to underline the eventual harmonious outcome.⁶⁸ Aristotle’s notion of *prohairesis* is, in fact, hardly conceivable without at least the possibility of a conflict that ‘must be adjudicated and settled by

⁶² Cf. *Eth. Nic.* 1111b6–13, 1139a20, with Fortenbaugh (1971).

⁶³ Hardie (1980: 164). ⁶⁴ Chamberlain (1984).

⁶⁵ Nevertheless, Aristotle distinctly favours the *spoudaios* (the man who excels in virtue, the good) as the special proprietor of προαίρεσις: *Rhet.* 1367b22–3: ἴδιον δὲ τοῦ σπουδαίου τὸ κατὰ προαίρεσιν.

⁶⁶ *Eth. Nic.* 1146b22–3: ‘the wanton man proceeds by exercising moral choice, believing that it is expedient to pursue whatever possibility for pleasure is at hand’ (ὁ μὲν γὰρ [ἀκόλαστος] ἀγεται προαιρούμενος, νομίζων αἰετὶ δεῖν τὸ παρὸν ἡδὺ διώκειν).

⁶⁷ Cf. *Eth. Nic.* 1111b26–7: ‘desire is connected with one’s moral goal, but *prohairesis* to what is necessary for the achievement of that moral goal’ (ἡ μὲν βούλησις τοῦ τέλους ἐστὶ μάλλον, ἡ δὲ προαίρεσις τῶν πρὸς τὸ τέλος).

⁶⁸ On conflict and Aristotle’s ‘harmonising eudemonism’, cf. Nussbaum (1986), esp. 333–5; White (2002).

making a choice, not eliminated or shown to be illusory'.⁶⁹ Moral coherence, the seal of *phronēsis*, is the end-product of *prohairesis*, which produces a harmonising restructuring of the agent's moral activity both vertically (harmonising his present with his future choices) and horizontally (harmonising one goal with another).⁷⁰

The moral process in the man who has achieved *eudaimonia* is a straightforward, linear sequence from *ēthos* (disposition towards virtuous deeds) to moral choice and finally to action (the exercise of proper moral choice). This linearity, however, is problematic in moral agents lacking in deliberative maturity, namely, in young men, or in a state of moral decline, namely, in old men.

In a defining peculiarity, the New Comedy mask system opens up a significant age gap between fathers and sons. While sons are usually very young adults, fathers are not men in their prime (which they could have been, even if they were supposed to have married relatively late in life), but 'old men' (*gerontes* or *pappoi*, aged well over forty-nine, which is the threshold of psychological maturity, according to Aristotle).⁷¹ This is a marked departure both from tragedy and from earlier Comedy, both Old and Middle, which had the 'mature man' type, the *akmazōn*. Possible mundane motivations for this (for instance, the fact that in the end New Comedy fathers, indeed, become 'grandfathers' very often) can be discarded. The need to portray fathers and sons as symmetrical mirror images of each other must have been the main rationale behind the convention.

David Wiles attempted to break down this convention with reference to the common tetradic structure of hot/cold and wet/dry, as well as Aristotle's classificatory grid of age groups

⁶⁹ White (2002: 237).

⁷⁰ Cf. Sherman (1989: 56ff.).

⁷¹ Cf. *Rhet.* 1390b9–11: 'the body matures from the age of thirty until the age of thirty-five, whereas the soul around the age of forty-nine' (ἀκμάζει δὲ τὸ μὲν σῶμα ἀπὸ τῶν τριάκοντα ἑτῶν μέχρι τῶν πέντε καὶ τριάκοντα, ἡ δὲ ψυχὴ περὶ τὰ ἐνὸς δεῖν πενήκοντα). An age around sixty seems the most common conventional assumption for New Comedy fathers. Periplectomenus of Plautus' *Miles Gloriosus*, who is fifty-four, emphasises the fact that he is still *young* for his age group (*Mil. Gl.* 629). Demipho in *Mercator* is sixty (*Merc.* 524), as must be Smikrines of *Epitrepones*, who is eligible to be a διαίτητής (cf. [Arist.] *Ath. Resp.* 53.4). Menedemus in Terence, *Heautontimorumenos* is 'sixty or more' (62–3).

according to *ēthos* in *Rh.* 1389a3–1390b8.⁷² Structuralism works well for Wiles in this respect. Aristotle's pattern distinguishes three such age groups: *neoi*, *presbyteroi* and *akmazontes*. Classifying New Comedy fathers as 'old men' makes the archetypal conflicts between fathers and sons that dominate the genre⁷³ oppositions between two extremes. As it happens, it is the 'absent intermediate point' that tells the tale. This is what the son is *oupō* ('not yet') and the father is *ouketi* ('no more'):

When we look at the genera of masks, we can say that one significant absence is the pivot of the whole masking system. This absence is defined by what he is not: not a slave, not female, not old, not young – for these states all represent excesses or deficiencies. The absentee is the perfectly balanced person, neither too hot nor too cold, neither too wet nor too dry. He is poised between his physical and his mental primes. He is the complete citizen, the complete free man ... The audience are invited to fill this void with an ideal figure constructed in the imagination.⁷⁴

A point missed by Wiles is that Middle Comedy, as evinced in *MIMC*², had a tripartite rather than bipartite pattern of male masks, comprising the categories Old Man, Young Man and an intermediate category of men younger than *pappoi* but older than *neaniskoi*.⁷⁵ Such a tri-generational scheme was also at play in fifth-century tragedy.⁷⁶ Unfortunately, we cannot be certain whether this intermediate age group was meant to represent the 'middle of two extremes'. After all, tragic men in their prime such as Theseus of Euripides' *Hippolytus* are hardly exemplars of moderation. But in Old Comedy, such masks may be the fitting choice for many of Aristophanes' main characters, usually married men with children and civic sensitivities. In any case, we need to stress the fact that the New Comedy mask system is innovative in breaking down this tripartition, and this is hardly insignificant.

⁷² Wiles (1991: 150ff.).

⁷³ On the thematic significance of this conflict, see Sutton (1993); Sherberg (1995).

⁷⁴ Wiles (1991: 159).

⁷⁵ As opposed to masks like A, AA, C, CA, E, F, G, GA, L, M belonging to Old Men, and masks like O, Q, QA, QQ belonging to Young Men, masks like D, H, Z, ZA belong to the intermediate category.

⁷⁶ Cf. Marshall (1999: 191); P. Arnott (1971: 45).

Theatre revels in stark contrasts; and Comedy in particular, if we believe Aristotle, has a famous penchant for portraying men who are 'worse than the men of our age' (χείρους . . . τῶν νῦν, cf. *Poet.* 1448a16–18). Unlike the *akmazontes*, whose distinguishing trait is the dominance of *prohairesis*, youths and old men constitute age groups in which *ēthos* as cause of action has either collapsed or is as yet undeveloped. In old men, *prohairesis* has been substituted by *logismos*, calculation, a self-delusion of rational control concomitant with the pursuit of expediency (*to sympheron*) rather than virtue (*Rhet.* 1390a15–16). We have seen *logismos* to be manifestly at play in the case of Demeas. While youths are acrimoniously conscious that they lack self-determination (this is brilliantly exemplified by such 'ethical speeches' as Phaedria's in *Ter. Eun.* 46ff., or Mnesilochus' in Plautus, *Bacch.* 612ff.), old men entertain fantasies of omnipotence, emblematised by Demea's typically confident πάντ' οἶδα in Menander's *Samia* (*Sam.* 466). In old men, the line leading from *ēthos* to *praxis* is discontinued by the intervention of a counterfeit form of self-discipline (old men appear *sōphronikoi*, *Rhet.* 1390a14), which frustrates or 'cools down' (κατεψυγμένοι γάρ εἰσιν, *Rhet.* 1389b31), the 'warm' drive towards action (οὔτ' ἐπιθυμητικοὶ οὔτε πρακτικοὶ κατὰ τὰς ἐπιθυμίας, *Rhet.* 1390a12–13). In old men, with the exception of the *senes amatores*, whom Menander does not seem to have portrayed too often, desire is 'enslaved to gain' (αἱ τε γὰρ ἐπιθυμίαι ἀνείκασι καὶ δουλεύουσιν τῷ κέρδει, *Rhet.* 1390a13–14). In young men, on the contrary, everything, including rational judgement, is enslaved to desire.

When Aristotle claims that young men τῷ ἥθει ζῶσι μᾶλλον ἢ τῷ λογισμῷ ('live according to their natural inclinations rather than according to calculation'), he is not contradicting our previous claims about youthful *ēthos* still being malleable and constantly *in statu formandi*. He emphasises the dispositional spontaneity of youthful action, and, most crucially, he brings forth the fact that reason cannot bridle their hypertrophic cupidity: 'as far as their moral disposition is concerned, young men are desirous and susceptible to acting on desire' (οἱ μὲν οὖν νέοι τὰ ἥθη εἰσιν ἐπιθυμητικοὶ καὶ οἷοι ποιεῖν ὧν ἂν ἐπιθυμήσωσι, *Rhet.* 1389a3–4). Youthful action is not exactly the realm of pure, animalistic desire (although youth and beast are

alarmingly close); youthful action is a schismatic state driven by the conflict between disposition and knowledge. Such conflict in the adult male was resolved, as we have seen, during the process of *prohairesis*. *Prohairesis*, however, we have also seen, can fail, especially in young adults. Aristotle reserves the term ἀκρασία, ‘un-restraint’, for this failure, which he explicitly contrasts with ἀκολασία, wantonness, an extreme but proairetic state.⁷⁷ Both *akolasia* and *akrasia* embrace self-gratification, especially of the carnal sort (*Eth. Nic.* 1148a5). While, however, *akolasia* is a conscious decision, *akrasia*, the elemental condition of youth (*Rhet.* 1389a3–6), is a state of crisis, in which the fissures between the rational and the irrational faculties of the soul are visible on the surface.

Suggestively, Aristotle’s discussion of *akrasia* (*Eth. Nic.* 1145b21–1152a36) is couched as the resolution of a paradox, the so-called Socratic Puzzle:⁷⁸ how is *akrasia* even possible? How could a person flagrantly contradict his best judgement?

Ἀπορήσειε δ’ ἂν τις πῶς ὑπολαμβάνων ὁρθῶς ἀκρατεύεται τις. ἐπιστάμενον μὲν οὖν οὐ φασι τινες οἷόν τε εἶναι· δεινὸν γὰρ ἐπιστήμης ἐνούσης, ὥς ᾤετο Σωκράτης, ἄλλο τι κρατεῖν καὶ περιέλκειν αὐτὴν ὥσπερ ἀνδράποδον.

One wonders how it is possible that somebody may have the ability to realise that what he is doing is wrong and still fail to exercise self-control. Some say that it is not possible to act this way knowingly. Because it is a terrible thing, Socrates believed, for a man to have knowledge but something else to overpower that knowledge and drag it around.

Aristotle resolves the problem by means of a practical syllogism (*Eth. Nic.* 1147a1ff.):

<i>Major premise</i>	Things of <i>x</i> quality are good or bad for men
ἐπιστήμη ἢ καθόλου	I myself am a man
κυρίως ἐπιστήμη	A thing of such general description is of <i>x</i> quality
<i>Minor premise</i>	
ἐπιστήμη ἢ κατὰ μέρος	The particular thing at hand is of <i>x</i> quality
δόξα τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ	
<i>Conclusion (an action)</i>	The thing at hand is good for me

⁷⁷ For a concise and lucid discussion of ἀκρασία in Aristotle, see Price (2006).

⁷⁸ Charles (1984).

The akratic is the agent who upholds the major premise (knowledge of universals/‘true’ knowledge), but either lacks awareness of the minor premise (perceptual knowledge), or, more poignantly, deliberately contravenes it, defeated (more than once Aristotle employs the word *hēttōn* and *hētta*) by the consuming influence of passion. *Akrasia* manifests itself either as impetuosity (*propeteia*) or as weakness (*astheneia*).⁷⁹ In either case, it is a morbid disposition (*astheneia* also stands for ‘disease’), laden with guilt and remorse, which, however, unlike proairetic vices, is curable (*Eth. Nic.* 1150b29ff.). Aristotle uses two sets of parallels for the akratic, who possesses but does not exercise knowledge: the first are the conditions of sleep, madness or drunkenness (*Eth. Nic.* 1147a11–17);⁸⁰ the second is the student or the actor, who may recite the verses of a great master like Empedocles, but has limited command over their meaning, because it has not yet consciously sunk in (*Eth. Nic.* 1147a18–21). Evidently, *akrasia* is particularly relevant in the case of youths, who, as they develop, ‘live in a state of virtual drunkenness’ (ὥσπερ οἱ οἰνωμένοι διάκεινται, *Eth. Nic.* 1154b 9–10). New Comedy youths usually commit their transgressions under the heavy influence of wine. *Akrasia*, of course, again in theatrically significant terms, is *hamartia* (an error of judgement) rather than *kakia*, vice (*Eth. Nic.* 1148a3, *Rhet.* 1389b3). Youths are prone to *hybris* (‘outrage, violence’), not *κακουργία*, ‘villainy, malicious criminal behaviour’ (*Rhet.* 1389b7–8). In them, the seed of virtue is preserved intact: σῶζεται γὰρ τὸ βέλτιστον, ἡ ἀρχή (*Eth. Nic.* 1151a25–6).

The complexities of agency in Greek drama – interlocking motivations, clashing urges and influences – are concentrated in what Jean-Pierre Vernant calls ‘the tragic question’: τί δράσω? In the youth, the pathos of this bifurcation, and hence the instability of its outcome, is especially poignant. All this amounts to a highly theatrical moment, in which future action remains, at least from the subjective point of view of the character himself, indeterminate and unpredictable. In the face of young men, New Comedy

⁷⁹ *Eth. Nic.* 1150b19–22.

⁸⁰ Cf. *Rhet.* 1389a18–19.

presents agents in whom the causal chain leading from *ēthos* to *praxis*, a harmonious state that Aristotle reserves for the *akmazōn*, has either collapsed (*pappoi*) or is still nascent (*neaniskoi*). It seems that the mask was slow to physicalise this collapse of *ēthos* in the physiognomy of old men, although the paucity of specimens from early Hellenistic times should give pause before hasty conclusions. It is certain, nevertheless, that at least by the second century BC, the old man's mask 'becomes increasingly grotesque, so that his lips, nose and brow are scarcely distinguishable from those of a slave'.⁸¹ Grotesqueness is a sign of degeneration, even subhuman-ness⁸² of *ēthos*. Slaves, after all, David Wiles remarks astutely, occupy in the New Comedy mask system the place the Japanese Noh reserves for its demons⁸³ – and may themselves be descendants from the Satyr. Slaves are a mere *empsychon organon* (*Eth. Nic.* 1161b4) with no proairetic faculties. Their drive to self-preservation, promoted by an opportunely trained intellect, is not unrelated to the old men's 'logistic' urge for gain.

Let us revisit now Joe Park Poe's expostulations about the supposed physiognomic 'inconsistency' of the youth mask in New Comedy. Examining a total of five masks, three tragic and two comic, Poe found that the masks display incongruities, which 'centrifugalise' *ēthos*, to use Malcolm Heath's term,⁸⁴ in a manner intolerable to his own criteria of coherence. These criteria seem to square well with Aristotle's concept of *homalotēs* (*Poet.* 1454a26ff.), but only on the face of it, because they disregard Aristotle's own understanding of *ēthos* especially in immature individuals such as young men. Poe's position in fact pertains more to the centripetal Unity propounded by Renaissance poetics. This seeks to obliterate anything that diverges from a central semantic kernel, to which all elements of the system should be subservient.⁸⁵ Ancient aesthetics, however, including Aristotle's,⁸⁶ were not as averse to centrifugality. Therefore, even if we were to accept that there is indeed 'inconsistency' in the New Comedy masks of Young Men, the recurrence of these

⁸¹ Wiles (1991: 154).

⁸³ Wiles (1991: 102).

⁸⁶ Heath (1989: 38ff.).

⁸² Much relevant material can be found in Garland (1995).

⁸⁴ Heath (1989).

⁸⁵ Cf. Heath (1989: 5).

‘eccentricities’, which is so frequent that it becomes systematic, should have alerted Poe to the possibility that different criteria of consistency, more tolerant of ambivalence, may apply to an *ēthos* such as the youth’s – an *ēthos* that is unstable and contradictory by definition. A mask that suggests an immature *ēthos* with under-developed proairetic faculties – torn between virtue and vice, prone to slips of judgement, and thus constantly frustrating any attempts towards centripetal unification – is remarkably attuned with Aristotle’s notion of *akrasia*. Far from being evidence of failure on the part of the mask-maker or providing reason enough to discard physiognomics as a semantic key altogether, such a mask produces an image of the youth as a moral agent that is much more nuanced and multifarious than one would suspect. Once more visuality in this pregnant form proves to be an inalienable parameter of Menander’s New Comedy.

An example: the ‘hypo-proairetic’ youth and the second *episeistos* mask

The mask, then, is intricately connected with the process of constructing character in New Comedy. To conceive the exact way the mask operates, however, we need the proper frame of analysis. The modern notions of character and individuality are obviously irrelevant to Menander. On the contrary, the Aristotelian concepts of *ēthos* and *prohairesis* as prerequisites of moral action (*praxis*) are of central significance. Realising that the mask suggests *ēthos* in the Aristotelian sense one understands the value of this new, semiotised mask as a theatrical tool. One can also begin to appreciate how physiognomics works on the mask, particularly of the youth. Apparent ‘inconsistencies’ on these masks especially, far from being imperfections of design or evidence that physiognomics is inappropriate as an interpretive tool, are indications that the mask-maker was well aware of the vagaries of the physiognomic project in general, and of the nature of youthful *ēthos* in particular. Youths are susceptible to counter-proairetic choices, not due to vice but due to *akrasia*. I have suggested that these conflicting proclivities of the immature moral agent are encoded on many a New Comedy youth mask. It must

have been particularly pleasurable for the spectator, with his superior knowledge, to follow these semiotic ironies, which complicate τὰ καθ' ἑκάστα of the action.

Take, for example, the second *episeistos* (Pollux, 4.147–8, Comic Mask No. 16), whom Pollux presents in close connection with the mask of the soldier (the first *episeistos*):

τῷ δ' ἐπισείστω, στρατιώτῃ ὄντι καὶ ἀλαζόνι καὶ τὴν χροίαν μέλανι καὶ μελαγκόμῃ, ἐπισείονται αἱ τρίχες, ὥσπερ καὶ τῷ δευτέρῳ ἐπισείστω, ἀπαλωτέρῳ ὄντι καὶ ξανθῷ τὴν κόμην.

The *episeistos*, who is a soldier and a braggart, has a dark complexion and black and wavy hair, as does the second *episeistos*, who is rather softer and has blond hair.

I chose to translate ἀπαλωτέρῳ as ‘rather softer’, to show that it can work both as a relative comparative with reference to the first *episeistos* (‘the second *episeistos* is softer than ...’) and, simultaneously, as an absolute comparative (‘rather soft’) pitting the second *episeistos* explicitly against a cognate mask, the *hapalos* (Pollux Comic Mask No. 13):

ὁ δ' ἀπαλὸς νεανίσκος, τρίχες μὲν κατὰ τὸν πάγχρηστον, πάντων δὲ νεώτατος, λευκός, σκιατροφίας, ἀπαλότητα ὑποδηλών.

The *hapalos* [the delicate young man] has hair like that of *panchrēstos*, whereas he is the youngest among young men, white in complexion, raised in the shadows [i.e., indoors], and showing signs of being soft.

The dark, ostensibly manly first *episeistos* and the white, tender *hapalos* (Figure 3.1) are the two masks that seem to circumscribe the semantic range of the second *episeistos* within the New Comedy mask system (the masks always signify by way of difference with one or more similar units).⁸⁷ Ἀπαλωτέρῳ gives the second *episeistos* a softness, which, we can assume, was reinforced by a white complexion, to complete the reversal of the first *episeistos*' traits.

By the standards of J. P. Poe the second *episeistos* would be the definition of an ‘inconsistent’ mask. The white complexion of the second *episeistos*, sign of early youth and indoor life (as the

⁸⁷ See the discussion in Chapter 4.



Figure 3.1 Specimen of the *hapalos* mask from Lipari (inv. 11239)

whiteness of the *hapalos* explicitly bespeaks), denotes a mask that, notionally, like the *hapalos* presents feminine traits. However, unlike the *hapalos*, the second *episeistos*, which as the Antioch mosaic has shown, could be given also to ‘special’ soldiers like Polemon of *Perikeiromene*, is not an effeminate or even a particularly soft mask. The mask’s blondness and wavy hair are indeed aggressive physiognomic features that predispose the character for feats of violence, even, in the narrative pattern of New Comedy, for an array of illicit sexual practices, such as rape – acts which threaten to demolish the *oikos* by rendering its women unmarriageable. The second *episeistos*, that is, displays a physiognomic ‘schism’, which is not there in the *hapalos*, but is in tune with the Aristotelian conception of the youth as a moral agent and should not be taken as evidence against the value of physiognomics. This is, quite likely, evidence that the *hapalos* denoted more passive, docile young men, perhaps incapable of decisive action,⁸⁸ whereas the second *episeistos* entails the possibility of deviance and violence.

⁸⁸ Before the discovery of the Antioch mosaic, one would be well placed to suppose that the *hapalos* would fit a character like the Moschion of *Perikeiromene*, who is all talk and no action, who relies exclusively on his slave for everything and who is obviously still under the hegemony of his mother. But with Polemon wearing the second

To gather the semantic field of the *hapalos* we may also consider the difference between the actions and the character of somebody like Chaerea of the *Eunuchus*, who will be analysed in detail below, and somebody like Pistoclerus in Plautus' *Bacchides* (Moschos in Menander's *Dis Exapaton*). Both Chaerea and Pistoclerus gain access to a house of love, but the way they conduct themselves in that house is diametrically different.

In a defining gesture, Pistoclerus rebels against the constraints of his very young age, symbolised by the pedagogue.⁸⁹ Pistoclerus considers associating with courtesans an act of virtual emancipation (*Bacch.* 139–42, 147–8). Nevertheless, it soon turns out that this liberation is illusory. Pistoclerus is a young dove braving the horizon for the first time (*palumbis*, the metaphor here might touch on colour, too, winking at the whiteness of the character himself). Somehow, though, he finds himself trapped in an interior space once more (*Bacch.* 50–6), this time in Bacchis' establishment. *Bacch.* 56, *nam huic aetati non conducit, mulier, latebrosus locus*, reads like a clear metatheatrical irony pointing to the mask: a 'place of shadows' is exactly what would be suitable for the mask of a *leukos skiatrophias* ('a pale-skinned boy raised in the shadows'), who has hardly been released from the inner sanctum of the οἶκος; but ironically, this particular *latebrosus locus* is a brothel, not an *oikos*. As soon as he peeps out, the lad is lured back into another shadowy interior, again dominated by women – this time, though, not *agathoi daimones*, but *malae bestiae*.

Pistoclerus' entry into the bacchanal is couched in initiatory language (Pistoclerus' fear is no less such a motif), yet Pistoclerus' initiation will ultimately fail (*Bacch.* 85–8):

Pist: Rapidus fluvius est hic, non hac temere transiri potest.
 Bacch: Atque ecaster apud hunc fluvium aliquid perdundumst tibi.
 manum da et sequere. P. Aha, minime. B. Quid ita? P. Quia istoc
 inlecebrosius fieri nil potest: nox mulier vinum homini adulescentulo.

episeistos, one wonders whether Menander would choose two 'white' masks for the young rivals or whether, for starker contrast, he would rather give Moschion a 'darker' mask like the *melas* or the *oulos neaniskos*. Either of the two choices would work.

⁸⁹ Cf. Ter. *And.* 54.

- Pist: This is a rapid river. One must not cross it light-heartedly.
 Bacch: And by Castor you are certainly bound to lose something in this river!
 Give me your hand and follow me.
 Pist: No way!
 Bacch: What then?
 Pist: Because there is nothing more tempting for a young man: night,
 woman, wine.

Less attention than it is due has been paid so far to the image of a youth crossing the river and its initiatory overtones: its archetype is Jason the ephebe,⁹⁰ who lost a sandal while crossing a river on his way to Iolkos.⁹¹ Like Jason Pistoclerus will lose something in his own ‘river’, only it will be his money and his virginity! Pistoclerus’ story, in fact, reverses the archetype of Jason. According to one version of the myth, Jason crossed the river carrying an old woman. Pistoclerus here “crosses the line” carried by a young woman by the hand. Pistoclerus’ emancipation (*cheir-aphetēsis*) is corrupted as manipulation (*cheiragōgia*). His rite of passage in the *Bacchides* is ironised and ultimately turned on its head.

If a character like Pistoclerus is meant for the *hapalos*, as I consider likely, then the stamp of this mask would be that, like the second *episeistos*, it is androgynous, but unlike the latter, it fails to outgrow its femininity and remains in the shadows. The second *episeistos* is a ‘white’ youth, for sure, but his whiteness is wild, leonine, with the potential of being even destructive. It combines the whiteness and softness that foretells timidity, hesitancy, even cowardice,⁹² with the ‘leonine’ temperament of

⁹⁰ On Jason as an ephebe, see Vidal-Naquet (1986 [1968]: 107ff.).

⁹¹ Cf. Pindar, *Pyth.* 4.72ff. On the motif of the *monosandalos* in antiquity, see Loos-Dietz (1994).

⁹² [Arist.] *Phgn.* 812a13–14: ὁ λευκός ἄγαν δειλός· ἀναφέρεται εἰς τὰς γυναικάς. ‘White men’ (λευκοί) are associated in the Greek imaginary with ἀπνία (sluggishness) and μαλακία (softness, flabbiness), female vices *par excellence*, in the anatomical as well as the ethical sense, cf. Arist. *Hist. An.* 608a25: μαλακώτερον γὰρ τὸ ἡθὺς ἐστὶ τῶν θηλειῶν. Being a ‘worthless white man’ (cf. Eustathius, *Comm. Hom. Il.* 1, p. 720, 15, van der Valk: οὐδὲν λευκῶν ἀνδρῶν ὄφελος) came dangerously close to becoming a woman, a *kinaidos* and a barbarian. Xenophon, *Hell.* 3.4.19, accumulates this discourse quite crisply:

ἡγούμενος δὲ καὶ τὸ καταφρονεῖν τῶν πολέμιων ῥώμην τινὰ ἐμβάλλειν πρὸς τὸ μάχεσθαι, προεῖπε τοῖς κήρυξι τοὺς ὑπὸ τῶν ληστῶν ἀλίσκομένους βαρβάρους γυμνοὺς πωλεῖν. ὁρῶντες οὖν οἱ στρατιῶται λευκοὺς μὲν διὰ τὸ μηδέποτε ἐκδύεσθαι, μαλακοὺς

blondness.⁹³ an explosive mixture all at once pointing to the epicentre of the *oikos* (that is, to a sanctioned, tame, civic kind of sexuality) and thrusting away from it towards possible subversions. The second *episeistos* is feminine, but not soft, or gentle, or weak (this is the semantic range of the word ἀπαλός). The second *episeistos* intimates an uneasy blend of centripetality and centrifugality in reference to the *oikos* and the bridled sexuality that pertains to it, a fundamental disjunction between the status of the character (a citizen son that by generic imperative is committed to marriage – remember the definition of *prohairesis* as commitment to a certain action – which in this case equals virtue and the Good) and the mask's proclivity to wayward, hubristic desire, which unhinges the centripetal commitment from the root. The *ēthos* of this youth mask – the mask of an immature moral agent, we must not tire to repeat – entails this Aristotelian fragmentation between proairetic and counter-proairetic potentialities as an indissoluble ensemble. Any attempt to dissolve this ensemble because the characteristics of the mask are not 'matching' one another or satisfying some preconceived and ultimately irrelevant notions of unity and consistency would be extremely ill-advised.

The second *episeistos* is a site of contest, a telling metonymy of the ambivalent and unstable *ēthos* of the youth in Aristotelian thinking. I believe that it fits uniquely not only the likes of Polemon, but also characters like Chaerea of Terence's *Eunuchus*

δὲ καὶ ἀπόνους διὰ τὸ αἰετ' ὀχημάτων εἶναι, ἐνόμισαν οὐδὲν διοίσειν τὸν πόλεμον ἢ εἰ γυναιξὶ δέοι μάχεσθαι.

Thinking that if he managed to make his soldiers feel contempt for the strength of their opponents, they would enter the battle with increased courage, he commanded the heralds to sell the barbarians whom the bandits captured stripped naked. So when the soldier saw that the barbarians have white complexions, because they never took their clothes off, and they were soft and unexercised, because they always moved on vehicles, they thought that the war would be no different than if they had to fight women.

On whiteness as an ideal for women and a scare-image for men, see Sassi (1988L 21–45); B. M. Thomas (2002). For the convention in vase painting, cf. Beazley (1951: 9). Generally, on Greek perceptions of colour – with emphasis, though, on phenomenology rather than anthropology – see Dürbeck (1977: 70–81, 260–8) (for white). Bradley (2009) deals with the Roman context, but his insights, especially in pp. 128–60, are valuable.

⁹³ [Arist.] *Phgn.* 812a15–16: οἱ ξανθοὶ εὐψυχοὶ ἀναφέρεται εἰς τοὺς λέοντας.

(based on two Menandrian originals, the *Eunouchos* and the *Kolax*) and possibly the Moschion of Menander's *Sikyonioi*, the first an accomplished sexual malefactor, the second a perceived one. There is no clear indication in the text of the *Eunuchus* that Chaerea is *leukos* (of a white complexion), but we can surmise as much fairly safely. He is explicitly said to be an *adulescentulus* (*Eun.* 686, 1021), or an *ephebus* (*Eun.* 824), at the age of sixteen by Pythias' calculations (*Eun.* 693). Chaerea is young enough for his father to be surprised that he went down to the city (*Eun.* 987: *an in astu venit?*). More importantly, he is immature enough in appearance to look not quite like a man yet; that is, to have a woman-like softness and pale complexion, to be one of those *pueri delicati* fit to become the *erōmenoi* of older men.⁹⁴ Chaerea's overall outlook is feminine enough to help him conceal his masculine identity easily (*Eun.* 375: *forma et aetas ipsast facile ut pro eunuchō probes*) and to disguise himself as a eunuch, a *monstrum homini*' (*Eun.* 696). His sexual urges are not perhaps stronger than any other youth's, but he has the audacity to act on them (*o scelestum atque audacem hominem!* *Eun.* 709).

Let me discuss briefly the case of this youth – a Terentian character, for sure, but with nothing particularly un-Menandrian about him – in the light of the suggestion that he is best suited not for the *hapalos*, but for the second *episeistos* mask. I urge the reader to ponder the interconnection of mask, *ēthos* and action in New Comedy by imagining for a moment, always of course with the caveats listed in the last section of [Chapter 2](#), how infinitely richer the construction of Chaerea's character becomes if one takes into account the visual semiosis of this mask as analysed above. To understand Chaerea, of course, one needs to juxtapose him with his older brother, Phaedria, who in the *Eunuchus* is in love with the courtesan Thais and faces as a rival the soldier Thraso (whom Terence inserts into the play from Menander's *Kolax*).

⁹⁴ 'You yourself would want to look at him, Phaedria', says Pythias in *Eun.* 687. The soldier Thraso also expresses a vague interest for the 'eunuch' in *Eun.* 479.

All New Comedy youths are weak-kneed in the sight of sexual temptation. Erotic desire has a powerful physical effect on them, which they can barely withstand. Remember the reaction of Sostratos at the sight of Knemon's daughter and compare the effect that the appearance of the courtesan Thais has on Phaedria in Act I of Terence's *Eunuchus* (*Eun.* 82–3): 'Parmeno, my whole body trembles and shivers from the moment I have seen her' (*totus, Parmeno, | tremo horreoque, postquam aspexi hanc*). Notice, however, the contrast between Phaedria and Chaerea. Phaedria's deliberations in *Eun.* 47–56, a battering of questions delineating alternative courses of action, constitute, one might say, a genuine moment of *prohairesis*: his agonising *quid igitur faciam* (*Eun.* 52) is a clear and ironic reminiscence of Vernant's aforementioned 'tragic question' (τί δράσω;). Phaedria's slave Parmeno ridicules his young master's self-exhortation 'to think his options through', that is, to choose the best over the worst (*etiam atque etiam cogita*, *Eun.* 56). Parmeno's retort denies the youth the ability to produce moral choice by exercising reason; he disabuses, that is, the youth of the delusion that he possesses the faculty of *prohairesis* in the uncertain matters of love: 'Master, you cannot control by logic (*consilio*) matters that have neither logic nor control (*modum*).'⁹⁵ It is, he says, as if trying to be 'sanely crazy' (*nihilo plus agas | quam si des operam ut cum ratione insanias*, *Eun.* 62–3)! The tiniest crocodile tear (*una . . . falsa lacrimula*, *Eun.* 67) is enough to cause this whole dream of self-control to come crashing down. And, indeed, it does. Realising that it is no use trying to fight his attraction to Thais, Phaedria is overwhelmed by a feeling of absolute helplessness, as the two parts of his soul, reason and desire, clash. The word Parmeno uses later (*Eun.* 178) to denote the youth's inability to stay firm on a moral course under the sweeping influence of *amor* is *labascit*: he 'breaks', he 'wavers', he 'becomes uncertain' (*OLD*, s.v.) – and, of course, eventually he gives in. This is the definition of *akrasia*. Even this earnest young man, who, as Parmeno himself admits, is otherwise not improper (*ineptus*), who is sober (*severus*), and

⁹⁵ On love as uncontrollable madness, cf. Prop. 1.1.

above all not *incontinens* (i.e., he is *egkratēs*!), collapses. The following lines (*Eun.* 73–4) are emblematic of what we can call the ‘hypo-proairetic’ nature of the New Comedy youth, his desperate oscillation in the face of moral choice:

et taedet et amore ardeo, et prudens sciens
vivos vidensque pereo nec quid agam scio.

My soul detests her and my love burns me up in the same time; awake and aware, alive and with eyes wide open I am heading to my doom and I don’t know what to do.

Phaedria’s abortive moral process results not in the decision to resist Thais’ sexual lure, but to succumb with the minimum cost. Still, even with this rough, half-baked attempt at self-control and self-assertion in the face of temptation, which results in Thais giving at least a little ground (*faciam ut iusseris*, *Eun.* 174), Phaedria distinguishes himself conspicuously from his younger brother. The mere fact that Phaedria does have even that futile moment of clarity contrasts bluntly with Chaerea’s purely akratic resolution to pursue his urges to the point of raping the girl he fancies. Some youths of comedy are portrayed as having a stronger ability to resist than others. Moschion of *Samia* or Charisios of *Epitrepontes* did not resist, but Sostratos did, although in the *Dyskolos* one cannot help feeling the protective aura of Pan and the Nymphs being extended upon Knemon’s girl. Chaerea does not try to fight his cravings back at all and he is not sorry for that in the least. He succumbs in the most complete and remorseless manner (*Eun.* 549ff.).

From the moment Chaerea lays eyes on the girl, she sticks to his impressionable fancy like the most omnipotent obsession (*Eun.* 293–7). His search for her is frantic, agitated (*alacris*, *Eun.* 304), full of violent outbursts (*Eun.* 302–3). He has to have her any way possible, violent coercion (*vi*) not excluded (*Eun.* 319–30). This citizen boy, whose destiny is to perpetuate the *oikos*, is, indicatively, beside himself – literally, he ‘has forgotten who he is’ (*oblitus mei*, *Eun.* 306) because of blind passion. The schism we talked about earlier manifests itself here in full glory. Chaerea’s eagerness to pick up on Parmeno’s suggestion that he disguise himself as the eunuch his brother was about to present to Thais

(*Eun.* 369) is such that it scares even the rascally slave himself (*quid agis? iocabar, Eun.* 378).⁹⁶ Chaerea is reminiscent of Sos-tratos' similar zeal in this scene, only the consequences here are real and grave. Chaerea manhandles Parmeno into submitting to his outrageous demands (*flagitium*, 383, a word connoting moral, even legal blame, cf. *OLD*, s.v.). He is not a rational moral being, but a force of nature, like a god or a beast. In fact, the imagery of both the bestial and the divine comes up in the description of his brazen act. Clad in the eunuch's variegated garment (*varia veste exornatus*, 683), Chaerea ravages Pamphila like a wolf would tear up a lamb (*Eun.* 832). Such was his ferocity that he ripped apart the wretched virgin's clothes and lacerated her hair (*Eun.* 646). An act of *audacia* (643–4) and *impudentia* (597, 838, 856) in the first place, in the wake of Pamphila's anagnorisis as a citizen (*virginem/vitiare civen, Eun.* 857) the rape is now also *adulterium* and *hybris* (Thais uses the terms *vitium*, 858, and *contumelia*, 865; Pythias later, teasing Parmeno, will use the Greek term *moechos*, 957).⁹⁷ Chaerea's justification for this hubristic act is to compare himself and his deed with Zeus' rape of Danae (*Eun.* 584ff.) and to present the fact as something completely natural for a young male to do (*Eun.* 604–6).⁹⁸ His defence: first, a shameless (*impudens*) attempt to minimise the harm done (*paullum quidam, Eun.* 856), which Pythias perceives as derision (*Eun.* 860); then, a grandiloquent reassurance that his self-gratification was actually 'the will of some god' (*Eun.* 875).

In his final jubilations Chaerea praises *fortuna*, the *gubernatrix* of his fate (1046), for having arranged so many blessings for him so quickly (*Eun.* 1033). But for the informed spectator tragic intertextuality, too, plays a good, humorous part in Chaerea's scandalous success: Chaerea's oblivion to the harm he has done, the dizzying nonchalance with which he describes the events, his certainty that he stands to suffer no negative consequences for his actions (*Eun.* 849; the possible consequences he could have

⁹⁶ Frangoulidis (1994c) discusses this scene from a metatheatrical point of view.

⁹⁷ *Moichos* is also the accusation hurled against the Moschions of *Perikeiromene* (357, 370, 390) and *Sikyonioi*.

⁹⁸ On this, see Tromaras (1985); Garelli (2009); Papaioannou (2010).

suffered, the horrible fate of adulterers, are put forth teasingly by Pythias in *Eun.* 941ff., in order to scare Parmeno), and above all his certainty that the final outcome of the incident will be *aeterna gratia* and *magna familiaritas* ('eternal good will and a great friendship') between their two houses (*Eun.* 872) is clearly an ironic reflection of the superior knowledge whereby mythical gods regard rape, and exactly the consequences of most rapes in both tragedy and New Comedy (on this point see further in [Chapter 1](#)).

The reference to the leonine temperament of the *ksanthoi* in [Arist.] *Phgn.* 812a15–16, which we cited above, points to a common physiognomical method: physiognomising by gender differentiation (NB: the masculine and the feminine as physiognomical categories may pertain to either biological sex), and, indeed, by analogy with the animal form. This is the principal methodology in the second part of the *Physiognomonika*. The supposition, of course, is that there exists a fundamental continuum in nature as a corporate body.⁹⁹ For Aristotle, the masculine and the feminine are *enantia*, anatomical and ethical extremes (*Gen. An.* 724b9–10), with the masculine on the higher/positive and the feminine on the lower/negative end of the antithesis.¹⁰⁰ 'The masculine is the absolute opposite of the feminine', we read in the *Physiognomonika* ([Arist.] *Phgn.* 809b11–13); 'the masculine is generally braver and more just by nature, whereas the nature of the feminine is more cowardly and more prone to injustice' (τὰ δ' ἄρρενα τούτοις ἅπασιν ἐναντία, τὴν φύσιν ἀνδρειότεραν καὶ δικαιότεραν εἶναι γένει, τὴν δὲ τοῦ θήλεος δειλοτέραν καὶ ἀδικωτέραν). The feminine is inclined to malfeasance and is quite complicated (τὰ θήλεα . . . κακουर्γότερα καὶ ἥττον ἀπλᾶ, Arist. *Hist. An.* 608a35–608b2), whereas the masculine 'is more straightforward and less deceitful' (τὰ δ' ἄρρενα . . . ἀπλούστερα καὶ ἥττον ἐπίβουλα, Arist. *Hist. An.* 608b3–4).

⁹⁹ Cf. Saïd (1983: 94).

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Saïd (1983: 93): Aristotle 'soutient la supériorité de l'homme sur la femme et pose entre les deux sexes l'existence d'un rapport hiérarchique analogue à celui qui, dans la famille, subordonne l'esclave au maître ou le fils au père, qui, dans l'homme, soumet l'âme au corps et qui, dans l'âme même, asservit le désir à la raison'. Exceptions to this gender hierarchy are treated by Aristotle as isolated, illusory or degenerate (Saïd 1983: 97, 98).

This would be the character's semiotic baggage, cunning femininity, if he were wearing the *hapalos*. But if Chaerea is wearing the second *episeistos*, as I think is more likely, then his physiognomy is more compound than that. His 'feminine' features are combined with the fiery, determined temperament denoted by his blondness. In fact, this mixture of femininity and aggression pertains to a major physiognomical paradigm, highlighted in the *Physiognomonika* as the image of 'feminine bravery', the panther (*pardalis*).¹⁰¹ The panther is the only exception Aristotle recognises to the general rule that the masculine is braver than the feminine (*Hist. An.* 608a33–5).¹⁰² Anatomically, the panther – much like Chaerea for that matter – displays all the insignia of a 'female' as opposed to a 'male' (*Phgn.* 809b14ff.). Contrary to the lion's warm and dry disposition, the panther is wet¹⁰³ and cold;¹⁰⁴ it is curvaceous rather than rectangular, fleshy instead of muscular, asymmetrical rather than symmetrical, smooth and soft rather than rough. Nevertheless, on the axis courage/cowardice, the panther clearly leans to the side of courage: 'of the animals that give the impression of bravery, the panther is the more female in form' (ἡ δὲ πάρδαλις τῶν ἀνδρείων εἶναι δοκούντων θηλυμορφότερόν ἐστι, *Phgn.* 809b36–7). Though the model of the female form (*thēleia idea*), the panther lacks the primary trait of the feminine, cowardice (*deilia*). By selecting the panther as the archetype of the feminine, the *Physiognomics* choose to present a more aggressive and ambivalent construct of femininity, threateningly intrusive into the masculine, to the effect of subversion. It is this sort of 'femininity', I think, that better describes the *ēthos* of someone like Chaerea, an adulterer, who creeps into the realm of civic masculinity and overturns it (the girl he rapes is a citizen, not a prostitute). The panther's *andreia* is the ferocity of the lion acted out with feminine craftiness and guile. The panther is 'petty,

¹⁰¹ On Greek beliefs surrounding the panther, see Wotke and Jereb (1949).

¹⁰² 'Females are less courageous than the males as a rule, with the exception of the bear and the panther. In this species the female seems braver' (ἀθυμότερα δὲ τὰ θήλεα πάντα τῶν ἀρρένων πλην ἄρκτου καὶ παρδάλεως· τούτων δ' ἡ θήλεια δοκεῖ εἶναι ἀνδρειότερα).

¹⁰³ Cf. Pollux, 5.82: 'you could say that the panther has a fluid, flexible body' (εἴποις δ' ἂν ἐπὶ παρδάλεως ὡς ἔχει τὸ σῶμα . . . ὑγρόν, εὐέλικτον).

¹⁰⁴ On the correlatives of this fundamental difference, see Carson (1990: 137–45).

dishonest, and generally speaking, deceitful' (τὰ δὲ περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν μικρὸν καὶ ἐπὶ κλοπῶν καὶ ὅλως εἰπεῖν δολερὸν, *Phgn.* 810a7–8). To the lion's frontal opposition and open assault, the tactics, as it were, of a hoplite, the panther juxtaposes disguise, hiding and ambush, the tactics of a guerrilla. It is the panther's skin, above all, the *pardalē*, that emblematises the nature of the beast. The panther is a variegated, spotty beast (*poikilos, stiktos*) – just like the eunuch's *vestis* that Chaerea donned to get access to Pamphila was *varia* (multicoloured).

It transpires, then, that reading Chaerea with physiognomics and the mask in mind would usher in, potentially, a whole nexus of cultural references, which would provide depth and perspective to the character, his *ēthos* and his actions. In the case of Chaerea, who is very young and feminine-looking – that is, most probably, of a soft, white complexion – not too many masks would be offered to the *didaskalos* to choose from; in fact, only two seem to apply, the *hapalos* and the second *episeistos*. The possibility that such a fiery, cocky character would not be given the more childlike mask of the *hapalos*, but rather the more aggressive one of the second *episeistos*, which combines the slyness of the feminine with the spirit of the lion in a dynamic mixture of ethical contradictions that corresponds very well with the unstable nature of the youth as a moral agent in Aristotelian philosophy, is, I think, considerable.

Anyhow, it is the principle that counts the most, and the principle is this. New Comedy characters wear masks, and these masks are semiotised. The mask is alluding to physiognomics, a 'science', more accurately a taxonomic tool of social control, that by the time of Menander is very much in vogue, evinced in contemporary art, rhetoric and elsewhere – in a period when a 'culture of viewing' is speedily developing and spectators are making exponential growth in appreciating the minutiae of spectacle. To dismiss the value of physiognomics would be to dissociate New Comedy from the cultural milieu (the political, the ideological and the philosophical) in which it developed. But physiognomics is not a *pas-se-partout*; it needs to be used

An example

with caution. Physiognomics denotes *ēthos* in the particular way we described both in [Chapter 2](#) and here. If New Comedy is a comedy of character, it is this Aristotelian *ēthos* we need to bring to bear, in order to understand how closely connected are in the real-time of Menander's performance constructing character and watching the actors play in mask.

OF MICE AND (YOUNG) MEN: THE MASK AS INTER-FACE

ὁρῶν ὁρῶντα

Euripides, *Bacchae*, 470

This chapter continues to explore strategies for creating theatrical meaning on the stage of New Comedy by visual and intervocal means, primarily by way of the mask. Through a case study, the professional soldier and his main ‘interlocutors’ – namely, on the one hand (and more extensively treated here), the two *kolax*-types (Pollux Comic Masks Nos 17–18), and, on the other hand (and treated in less detail), his young rivals – the chapter illustrates, but more importantly attempts to qualify, the fundamental structuralist insight that the theatrical mask is not a solitary but a dialectic sign.

As the reader will have noticed already in the last part of [Chapter 3](#), discussion inevitably leads us beyond Menander and towards Plautus and Terence. The assumption behind this is that Plautus’ characters, too, as well as Terence’s, play in masks of the Greek style. Thus, my discussion takes issue with theories arguing that Plautus either had no masks at all or had devised a simplified version of the Greek New Comedy system based mostly on the *fabula atellana*.¹ My fundamental position, developed fully in Petrides (2014b), is that in the absence of any independent evidence whatsoever supporting the idea that Plautus created a hybrid system fusing the Greek mask types with those of the Atellana, and given that all the supposed internal evidence is inconclusive at best, we cannot but surmise that in his comedies Plautus retained the Greek look in terms of the mask as well, in accordance with his practice regarding all other components of *opsis*. The theory that the formative pressures of Italian ‘popular’ drama on Plautus’ Roman New Comedy were so

¹ See, for instance, Marshall (2006).

powerful that they impinged even on the visual dimension of his performance, and for that matter selectively so (affecting the mask alone), seems to over-compensate for the earlier skewed view of the Roman playwright as a derivative phenomenon. It is much more likely than not, I believe, that Plautus retained the Greek system of masks. Undoubtedly, the Greek mask he inherits and presents to his audience, a mask conducive to *ēthē* of psychological subtlety, is by definition undermined when dislocated to a different performance context. Nonetheless, for all the essential discontinuity between Plautus' and Menander's comic worlds, some of his mask practices, at least, especially those implicating the dialogic, interfacial aspect of the mask examined in this chapter, can safely be assumed to resume the Greek New Comedy traditions.

Masks in dialogue: *Sikyonioid*, 176ff.

In both [Chapter 2](#) and [Chapter 3](#) we talked extensively about the politics of the gaze and the role of physiognomics as an ideological tool of social taxonomy and control. Nowhere else in New Comedy is this application of physiognomics more evident than in Menander's *Sikyonioid*, 176ff. This is the messenger speech that narrates the events of the assembly at Eleusis, which decided the fate of the beleaguered suppliants Dromon and Philoumene. This scene is densely intertextualised, possibly even more so than we can gather. On the one hand, it recalls verbatim, more than once, the messenger speech in Euripides' *Orestes* (866ff.) generating the usual Menandrian interplay between the urban and the mythical;² on the other hand, it furnishes a rare insight into an audience whose gaze is self-consciously physiognomic.

The Eleusinians who attend the Assembly relate to Moschion and Stratophanes, according to the words of the messenger, by way of physiognomising their appearances. What is most relevant to the concerns of this chapter is that their physiognomic impressions are produced in juxtaposition, as the two characters appear side by side to make their case in front of the gathering. Moschion

² See the discussion in Katsouris (1975a: 29–54); Belardinelli (1984); and especially Belardinelli (1994: 158–60), with extensive commentary.

and Stratophanes contest each other's claim on the girl. In the absence of hard evidence or impartial witnesses, what is at stake is the two opponents' prerogative to be believed in their own right. To recall Hermogenes, with whom we started this book, this boils down to a contest of *ēthos*, a rhetorical *amphibētesis* turning on the person's *poiotes*³ – only here words, at least Moschion's, appear less consequential than physiognomies.

The Eleusinians apply the method that we suggested is also at play in the case of Chaerea in Terence's *Eunuchus*, namely, to physiognomise by way of gender differentiation, referring to an ideal 'feminine' and 'masculine' form. The Eleusinians, that is, construct Moschion's and Stratophanes' characters dialectically according to a reductive 'bioethics' of gender denoted by their exterior features. They read their physiognomies (i.e., their masks, which the audience will see side by side in the very next scene) by fitting them into an ideological pattern: Moschion, who is given short shrift, is 'feminised', whereas Stratophanes is 'masculinised' in contradistinction. Moschion, a 'youth of white skin, rather soft, and beardless' (μειράκιον . . . λευκόχρω[ν] | ὑπόλειον ἀγένειόν τι, *Sik.* 200–1), is set against a Stratophanes who is 'very masculine to look at' (ὅ]ψει τις ἀνδρικός πᾶν, *Sik.* 215). Stratophanes' description is abstract and minimal, as opposed to the rich asyndeton that qualifies Moschion. The method is familiar from Aristotle: the superiority of the 'masculine' is vindicated by the insufficiency of the 'feminine'; it is an issue not so much of essence, but of difference – to put it otherwise, essence comes out only by way of difference.

For the Eleusinians, Moschion represents a whole constellation of masculine counter-paradigms. His whiteness, an unmistakable marker of femininity, along with the softness and smoothness of his skin, intimates dangerous social and sexual deviance. In the Greek imaginary, there is only a thin line dividing social aberration from psychopathology when it comes to the 'female form'. Interestingly, though, if you look at the language closely, as long as Moschion appears before the Eleusinians on his own, they cannot make up their minds conclusively concerning his *ēthos*;

³ See the beginning of [Chapter 1](#).

they go back and forth, allowing room for doubt. First, they contemplate a verdict of *bdelyria*, a damning term of abuse, which can denote physical ugliness but also includes, among other transgressions, the notions of *anaideia*,⁴ *hybris*⁵ and *thrasos*.⁶ But if Blass' widely accepted supplement in line 209 is correct (κοῦ] παντελῶς ἦν βδελυρός), Moschion's beauty throws them off. He is not *bdelyros*, at least not in the physical sense, quite the contrary – and beauty is rarely a sign of inner imperfection in Greek culture (the audience may recognise another 'inconsistency' here, which, of course, bodes well for Moschion and recalls the fact that New Comedy youths are never damned for their transgressions). The Eleusinians recover quickly from their temporary hesitation, but the next unfavourable judgement is still only their penultimate one: 'he was not all bad to look at – still we did not like him. He gave us every impression (*katephanē*) of a *moichos*' (*Sik.* 209–10). The preposition κατά in the composite verb is a forceful marker of finality and resolution, suggesting that the Eleusinians have decided firmly, but the suffix *-ōdēs*, 'looking like a *moichos*', still leaves things in the balance problematising the very ability of the gaze to pierce through the phenomena. Physiognomics, we remember, is not an exact science, but an agonising experiment, not immune to self-doubt.

However, all uncertainty is resolved as soon as Stratophanes stands up and speaks; that is, as soon as the physiognomic endeavour of the Eleusinians is transformed into a judgement by way of comparison and differentiation. Moschion is read through Stratophanes and Stratophanes through Moschion. Only then do the Eleusinians stop doubting that Moschion is *lastauros*, 'a queer', and *exyrēmenos*, 'a clean-shaven sissy'. With all these terms of abuse and their correlatives,⁷ the Eleusinians set Moschion firmly against the counter-paradigm of Stratophanes. Ironically enough, the Sikyonian stranger has all the trappings of civic masculinity, whereas Moschion, the citizen, is branded with suspicions of a

⁴ For example, Dem. 8.68, 19.175, 21.151. ⁵ For example, Dem. 21.143.

⁶ For example, Ar. *Eq.* 303–4.

⁷ Notice that the word *bdelyros* is included in Pollux's list of synonyms for *kinaidos* in *Onom.* 6.126–7, a stupendous arsenal of verbal abuse.

subversive and surreptitious mode of conduct, which contravened the masculine paradigm of citizen husband and hoplite soldier.

It is the panther and the lion all over again. In the presence of Moschion, even Stratophanes' pathetic cries, his 'river of tears', which otherwise might have insinuated suspicious, unmanly excess,⁸ are guarded from 'feminisation': they are denoted precisely with the 'leonine' verb *brychōmenos* (*Sik.* 221).⁹ Even the conventional fact that, as a *neaniskos*, Stratophanes too is beardless is comically brushed aside (only Moschion is abused as *ageneios*). On the contrary, in the presence of Stratophanes, even Moschion's physical movements acquire an aura of transgression. Neither Gomme and Sandbach (1973) nor Belardinelli (1994) comment on *parapēdai* (*Sik.* 259), but this is not an innocent choice of word. As a designation of physical movement, Xenophon, *Cyn.* 6.22, uses it for the female hunting dog and its jerky, fawning jumps; with reference to human behaviour, Aeschines, 3.192, reserves it for the act of sidestepping the law. *Parapēdai*, literally 'jumps in', is supposed to describe, always in physiognomic terms, a strange, intrusive, undignified and generally reprehensible movement of an individual of questionable character and suspect intentions.

This scene from Menander's *Sikyonioi*, then, has significant lessons to teach on how the masks produce theatrical meaning in New Comedy performance. In the scene immediately following the messenger speech, Moschion and Stratophanes face off on

⁸ Pathetic mourning becomes a *pathicus* in Ar. *Ran.* 422–6. In Euripides' *Orestes* itself both the Phrygian slave and the eponymous hero are prone to such effusive interjections. As for Achilles' mourning in *Iliad* 18, an archetypal moment, its propriety was in antiquity the focal point of a continuing debate on the ethics of lamentation. The two most notable anti-Achilleian contributions, according to the Scholia, had an axe to grind: for Zoilos, the *homēromastix*, Achilles' 'womanly' behaviour belittles Homer. For Plato's Socrates, excessive, womanly lamentation such as that of Achilles or Priam contradicts the *autarkeia* of virtue and provides further proof of how unprofitable poetry is (cf. esp. *Resp.* 387e9–11). Even Achilles' apologists, however, such as Zenodorus (p. 137 Pusch), regarded his reaction as extraordinary (Schol. *Il.* 18.22–35, p. 440 Erbse). If Achilles' reaction to his great loss could be thus ambiguous for the Greeks, Stratophanes' reaction at the potential loss of a girl he had never really had (Philoumene is a virgin) is even less dignified at face value. Even so, the presence of Moschion is a safeguard against any negative characterisation.

⁹ Although used in various ways (see *LSJ*, s.v.), *brychōmai* was the *vox propria* for the lion's roar: cf. Pollux, 5.87(a passage that names the sounds of animals): λεόντων δὲ βρύχημα βρυχηθὺς βρυχάσθαι βρυχώμενοι.

stage apparently for the first time. Whether Moschion wears the *hapalos* or the second *episeistos* (I think we can safely surmise that here, too, these are the two more obvious choices), the spectators of the *Sikyonioi* are guided to read his mask in tandem with, and in juxtaposition to, the mask of his rival (most probably the first *episeistos*). The New Comedy mask, as in most systems, unloads its full semiotic capacity only in collaboration with other masks. It is also clear, though, that the mask also works in a continuum with other signs by which it is informed (verbal, kinetic, proxemic, but also material signs, as we shall see further down, such as costume and props). The mask is a dialectic and a systemic, not a solitary sign; it creates a whole nexus of semiotic associations, which performance analysis should seek to unravel, if it is to reconstruct, to the limited extent possible, the fourth-century BC spectator's experience of Menander.

Masks and difference

Modern analysis of mask systems, including the system of New Comedy, has been fundamentally influenced by French structuralism, and especially by Lévi-Strauss' seminal enquiries on north-west Indian masks.¹⁰ Lévi-Strauss' major insight has been that masks belonging to ritual or, indeed, theatrical systems can only be studied as interdependent signs of a *langue*, which produce meaning by way of difference.¹¹ Various individual traits of masks, Lévi-Strauss found, which are incomprehensible, or even meaningless, in isolation, make sense if contrasted to antithetical traits of other, similar masks. A mask does not function *in vacuo*, but 'supposes other real or potential masks always by its side ... A mask is not primarily what it represents but what it transforms.'¹² As David Wiles put it:

Spectators can only perceive meaning through perceiving contrasts or opposites. They can contrast striking features against a normative, intermediate or idealised face [*sc.* or a physiognomic standard, such as the 'feminine' or the 'masculine'], and they can register more subtle features when those features are inverted in an otherwise similar mask.¹³

¹⁰ Lévi-Strauss (1982). ¹¹ Cf. Saussure (1916: 166ff.).

¹² Lévi-Strauss (1982: 144), quoted by Wiles (1991: 72). ¹³ Wiles (1991: 89).

Like the patterns of language, masks signify by making gestures towards other masks in performance. Lévi-Strauss conceptualised this complementarity between masks as a series of oppositions between ‘minimal pairs’. Pollux’s catalogue (4.133ff.) confirms the essential veracity of this insight.¹⁴ Of course, masks form multiple ‘minimal pairs’ simultaneously. ‘Masks’, writes Tony Harrison, ‘have the curious ability to look many people [*sc.* and other masks] in the eye at the same time.’¹⁵ In the theatre masks interact and cross-pollinate to reproduce structures of power and ideology that pertain to the extratheatrical world; in other words, to produce an intervisual effect.

Reading a mask in performance means reading at least two masks in juxtaposition. The features of the masks are relational and dialectic, because the mask itself is dialectic by nature. The Greek word for both mask and face, after all, was *prosōpon*,¹⁶ etymologically speaking ‘something that lends itself to somebody else’s gaze’. You cannot have a *πρόσωπον* unless you have somebody looking at it. A *prosōpon* materialises or fades away in relation to the presence of a viewer. To this effect, the famous experiment by the Soviet film pioneer Lev Kuleshov, which aimed to demonstrate ‘the power of editing to alter the viewers’ perception of the subject shown’, offers some invaluable clues. Here is how M. M. Winkler describes it:

Kuleshov juxtaposed shots of a bowl of soup, a young girl playing with a toy, and a dead body in a coffin, with the identical close-up of the face of Ivan Mozhukhin, a famous stage actor. In this way, Mozhukhin appears to be looking at different objects, although Kuleshov had taken the footage of him from an

¹⁴ On contrasting pairs of masks in Pollux’s catalogue, see Robert (1911: 51ff.).

¹⁵ T. Harrison (1998: 18).

¹⁶ On the semantics of *prosōpon* and *prosōpeion* in Greek theatre, see Frontisi-Ducroux (1987), (1995). It should be repeated, however, that the mask is not just a face, although this has been a common misunderstanding since the dawn of ethnological research on masks; cf. Pernet (1988: 20): ‘L’intérêt exclusif pour la face a également favorisé le rejet au second plan de nombreux masques qui n’ont précisément pas de “visage” mais une simple cagoule . . . Cette fascination a également joué un rôle dans l’intérêt relativement réduit porté au costume de masque, trop vite et trop souvent considéré comme un simple complément destiné à dissimuler le porteur.’ Greek helmet masks are simulation heads rather than simply faces. The coiffure is just as important a differential in the New Comedy system as any. As for the importance of costume, this is paramount, especially in cases like that of the soldier.

archive. With each combination of shots, viewers read different reactions into his face and were reported to have praised him for the subtlety of his acting.¹⁷

In Kuleshov's experiment, although nothing of the sort 'really' happened, spectators were under the illusion that the face they saw changed expression in relation to the object juxtaposed with it. Each different syntagmatic association of face and object determined the face in its own distinct way and transformed its 'meaning'. By way of projection, the spectators transposed their own reactions onto Mozukhin's otherwise lifeless stare. New life was breathed into an expressionless and frozen face when that face engaged in 'dialogue' with the objects paraded in front of it. Its signification was the product of juxtaposition, but, above all, and this is something Winkler fails to note, it was the result of a clever manipulation of the spectators' pool of paradigmatic images and their psychological connotations. The mask as instrument of communication and vehicle of meaning exists only by showing itself to an audience within a given context of exchange. Otherwise 'dead', it is animated in performance, a live artistic and social event, which comprises interaction not only with other masks, but also, crucially, with the viewing public. The meaning of the mask is directly relative to, well-nigh co-extensive with, the filter of the viewer's gaze,¹⁸ what the viewer carries into the performance: this dynamics of reception and intertextuality is something that a purely structuralist analysis runs the risk of playing down.

The following is a point of cardinal importance. Masks signify by way of difference. What, however, actually constitutes a significant difference, and how this difference specifically translates into comprehensible signifieds, is conventional and culture-specific. We perceive a contrast between blond and dark, but the way we translate this sensorial piece of data into 'meaning' is a product of cultural and, indeed, linguistic indoctrination.¹⁹ In fact, if we

¹⁷ Winkler (2002: 58).

¹⁸ To the same effect, cf. Marshall (1999: 190): 'Yoking the use of masks to the venue itself helps to maintain a focus on how the audience perceives the masks, which is more important than how the masks actually looked when we try to understand the plays better.'

¹⁹ This is what cognitive theorists and anthropologists call 'radical linguistic relativity' or 'the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis', cf. Kay and Kempton (1984) and Garro (1986), with



Figure 4.1 Lekythos from Gela by the Pan Painter (c. 470 BC)

single out blond/dark as a significant difference at all, it is because we have been ‘programmed’ to recognise it as such by other cultural structures.

To study briefly one Greek example, we can look at a lekythos from Gela by the Pan Painter (dated c. 470–60 BC) (Figure 4.1).²⁰ On this vase two Erotes, identified as Eros and Anteros,²¹ are flying against each other head to head, hovering between three palm leaves. As they reach out for the central palm leaf, which, *pace* Greifenhagen, they seem to be claiming each one for himself, not just ‘carrying’, Eros and Anteros, contesting each other in an *agōn* here as elsewhere,²² are visualised as each other’s

further bibliography. The hypothesis maintains that each language embodies an intellectual system that shapes the way its speakers perceive the world. ‘The structure of anyone’s native language strongly influences or fully determines the world-view he will acquire as he learns the language’ (R. Brown 1976: 128). ‘The “real” world is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group’ (Sapir 1951: 160). The hypothesis was mainly verified on perceptions of colour, where it ‘predicts that linguistic categories people use to talk about colour influence how colour is perceived, processed, stored and retrieved by the mind’ (Garro 1986: 129). Although the results of the research on colour were contested, even the opponents of the hypothesis admitted that other domains, such as religion, might offer ‘greater potential scope for application’ of the theory, cf. Kay and Kempton (1984: 67).

²⁰ Greifenhagen (1957: 8–11, pls 1–4).

²¹ For this special facet of the Eros cult, cf. Furtwängler (1884–6: 1343). For a wider perspective, see Merrill (1944).

²² Cf. Pausanias, 6.23.5: ‘and in one of the wrestling grounds [in Elis] there is a relief of Eros, with Anteros worked in by his side. Eros on his part is carrying a branch of palm

symmetrical opposites. The left Eros reaches for the palm leaf with his left hand, the right Eros with his right hand. With his right hand, the left Eros grasps a periwinkle at the front; with his left hand, the right Eros holds another periwinkle at the back. More importantly, the left Eros has well-groomed, ‘thick, black, shiny hair, whereas the right one is blonde and his hair is blown by the wind’.²³ More than anything else,²⁴ as the wrestling motif suggests – two Erotes wrestling in the presence of a woman, probably the ‘prize’²⁵ – Anteros stands for ‘the contest spirit in sexual relationships’.²⁶ This contest may be internalised (a lover’s struggle between reason and passion, as in the case of Phaedria in Terence’s *Eunuchus*); or it may be externalised (lover versus recalcitrant beloved or, more obviously, lover versus rival). More importantly for the purposes of understanding the New Comedy mask system contextually, this erotic competition is structured visually as an antithesis between ‘blond’ and ‘black’, as in the case of Stratophanes and Moschion, where the difference, far from being a mere iconographical motif or a matter of theatrical convenience, is explicitly over-determined with reference to civic standards of morality.

Opposition and contrast are in the eye of the beholder, and this ‘eye’ is culturally conditioned: this is the liminal space where the ideology of the New Comedy mask is divulged. Any historical analysis of the interplay between mask and audience would fall short, unless accompanied by a reconstruction of the cultural process that shaped the audience’s preconception of what should be looked at on a mask and how. Gaze is already a transposition, a performative act of construction and interpretation. The spectator’s gaze is informed by translating the visual code of

tree, whereas Anteros is trying to take the palm away from him’ (καὶ ἐν τῶν παλαιστρῶν μιᾷ [in Elis] τύπος ἔρων ἐπειργασμένον καὶ τὸν καλούμενον Ἀντέρωτα ἔχει δὲ ὁ μὲν φοῖνικος ὁ ἔρων κλάδον, ὁ δὲ ἀφελῆσθαι πειράται τὸν φοῖνικα ὁ Ἀντέρως).

²³ Greifenhagen (1957: 10–11). Which figure is Eros and which is Anteros is unimportant, since the difference is structural. In a later story (Eunap. VS 5.2.2–6), the blond boy is Eros, the dark Anteros.

²⁴ Anteros may variously embody (a) Love returned (cf. Plato, *Phdr.* 255d8–255e1, Ach. Tat. 1.9.6.) or (b) the demon avenging unrequited love (cf. Pausanias, 1.30.1).

²⁵ Cf. *LIMC*, s.v. ‘Eros’, v. III.1, pp. 850–942, at 883, No. 390.

²⁶ Scanlon (2002: 255–64, esp. 260 and 263). Cf. also Calame (1999: 102).

the mask into those matrices of the communal value system that render the mask's physiognomy meaningful. Physiognomics, a 'consciousness' of which we see at play on the Gelan lekythos, is one such matrix (but not the only one) providing an insight into the process of selecting differences on masks and highlighting the network of prejudice and naturalisation that lies behind it. There is nothing more inherently political, in the broader Greek sense, than this.²⁷

The semiotics and the anthropology of the mask intersect: it is impossible to recover the original code of the mask unless we also reconstruct the intertexts, literary and cultural, whereby the audience was likely to filter that code.²⁸ Reading a mask, like every reading, is an intertextual and ideological project. Only a pragmatic or, to use Bakhtin's term, a 'metalinguistic' approach, which handles the masks as historically specific utterances and not as an ahistorical *langue*, can truly do justice to the contribution of the mask as a theatrical sign in New Comedy. Dealing with masks, we need to restore the perspective of the interlocutors – the other mask, the spectator – and understand the system of masks as, in fact, something much messier than a 'system': a web of correlated signs, where output depends on the varying intertextual input.

In the following pages I shall try to (re)construct such a contextualised frame of analysis in order to bring forth the dialogic dimension of the mask, its 'inter-facial' substance. My case study will be the interaction of the soldier and the parasite. The soldier–parasite pair belongs to those relatively 'safe' cases we singled out at the end of [Chapter 2](#) – cases in which the very limited number of alternatives leaves little room for doubt as to the identification of character and mask, therefore our research treads on much safer ground. Unfortunately, the loss of Menander's *Kolax* does not allow us to see how Menander himself treated this interaction. It is probable that, as happens with other routines that hark back to Middle Comedy, like the braggart cook, the greedy *hetaira*, the moronic *agroikos* or the hungry parasite, Menander used the soldier–parasite sequence only sparingly. However, the pair Gnatho–Thraso, whom

²⁷ See further in [Chapter 5](#) in relation to the *panchrēstos* mask.

²⁸ Cf. Sourvinou-Inwood (1991).

Terence inserts into his *Eunuchus* from Menander's *Kolax*, shows that the Greek playwright was not beyond this traditional vignette. Nevertheless, the 'transformation' of the soldier in his interaction with the parasite in the Plautine examples and in Terence's *Eunuchus* comes out clearly enough to support the working hypothesis on which this chapter is built: that New Comedy masks are interfaces; they engage in 'dialogue' on stage and in their interaction they inform each other's signification fundamentally.

The *episeistos* masks and the professional soldier

Before examining the interplay between soldier and parasite, let us have a look at the soldier himself, the semantic field of his mask, and the possibilities this affords for different constructions of his role. Of all the ways to write and play the *miles gloriosus* Menander's typical choice, a reflective, sentimental mode, which redeems the soldier and usually, through timely anagnorisis, rehabilitates him into the society of citizen men, may have been the least representative of the norm.²⁹ On the contrary, the *palliata* provides an image of the *miles* much more attuned with the semantics of *alazoneia* (*LSJ*, s.v.) as found in the fragments of Greek Middle Comedy:³⁰ swagger and bravado, vanity, false pretension, imposture and ultimately 'impotence' (a symbolic diminution of the character's masculinity). The 'stereotypical' *miles gloriosus* is a fraud and a sham. Being a *miles* of this stripe is all about usurping registers like epic heroism, sexual valour and social engagement with the elite (the soldier claims to share a table with kings and sovereigns).³¹ All this misappropriation, of course, is hilariously unsuitable and fake.

Of course, as we have come to expect from masks of young men, physiognomically speaking the first *episeistos* (Pollux,

²⁹ On Menander's soldiers, see MacCary (1972), and mostly P. G. McC Brown (2003/4), who asks the question to what extent 'a picture of soldiers as outsiders derived largely from Latin comedy can be made to fit the surviving remains of Menander's comedies'.

³⁰ On the type of *alazōn* (Theoph. Ch. 23), see Ribbeck (1885); Hoffmann and Wartenberg (1973); MacDowell (1990); Diggle (2004: 431ff.).

³¹ Cf. *Eunuchus*, 391ff., Antiphanes, fr. 200 K.-A. with the commentary of Konstantakos (2000: 216–31, etc.).

Comic Mask No. 15, quoted in [Chapter 2](#)) is not condemning the soldier beyond redemption – and the ambiguities of the mask are such that they accommodate Menander’s approach as much as Plautus’. Surprisingly enough, as much as most of Menander’s soldiers appear diametrically opposed to Plautus’, Menander does not write contrary to the semiotics of the *episeistos* masks. Menander is foregrounding different potentialities of the mask to tell a different kind of story, but he remains within the semantic field of the *episeistoi*. The semiotics of the soldier mask is neither ignored nor ‘denuded’ in Menander, but enters the fray of constructing character as decisively as any other.

In fact, the first *episeistos*’ physiognomy is particularly engrossing in its potential ambivalence, starting with his dark complexion, signified in Pollux with the verb μελαίνεται. Pollux does not specify exactly what μελαίνεται entails. There were various constructions of ‘black’ in physiognomics, varying by hue. It seems unlikely that the soldier’s dark skin was meant to be ‘too dark’, that is, an explicit sign of cowardice, since the ethnological archetype of this perception was the Egyptian or the Ethiopian.³² If then the soldier’s skin was meant as the intermediate between ‘too black’ and ‘too white’,³³ the soldier in fact displays the physiognomic potential of true manliness³⁴ – the quality that the Eleusinians recognise on Stratophanes without the slightest hint of the irony heaped upon Pyrgopolinices. On the other hand, though, there is no question about the negative value of black hair: ‘black hair signals cowardice and crafty greed’ (μέλαινα κόμη δειλίαν καὶ πολυκέρδειαν ἀγγέλλει, Adam. 2.37). The first *episeistos*, too, therefore, presents the usual ‘schism’ of New Comedy youth masks, the physiognomic equivocality that enhances the theatricality and, indeed, the humour in the mask, and arguably reflects

³² Cf. [Arist.] *Phgn.* 812a12–13: οἱ ἄγαν μέλανες δειλοί· ἀναφέρεται ἐπὶ τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους, Αἰθίοπας (‘men of excessively black complexions are cowardly; the standard of reference are the Egyptians and the Ethiopians’).

³³ Cf. [Arist.] *Phgn.* 812a13–14: οἱ λευκοὶ ἄγαν δειλοί· ἀναφέρεται ἐπὶ τὰς γυναῖκας (‘men of excessively white complexions are cowardly; the standard of reference are the women’).

³⁴ Cf. [Arist.] *Phgn.* 812a14–15: τὸ πρὸς ἀνδρείαν συντελοῦν χρῶμα μέσον δεῖ τούτων εἶναι (‘the complexion that is conducive to manliness must be the middle between these two’).

the instability of the youth's proairetic faculties. It seems that this physiognomic split of the first *episeistos* was further enhanced by a fierce expression on the face, which could be interpreted either as a 'Stratophanes-que' solemnity or as risible bluster of Pyrgopolinices' kind.

Above all, however, the hair, the most prominent feature on the soldier mask, is the epitome of his ambivalent physiognomy. In Plautus for that matter, the hair is also a prime symbol of his debunked virility. In a play like *Miles Gloriosus*, which comments on the soldier in a densely metatheatrical manner, the soldier's hair is duly singled out and highlighted from the very beginning of the play. In the opening scene (analysed in detail below in this chapter), a bunch of fictitious female adulators, made up by the soldier's parasite to further puff up Pyrgopolinices' egomania, in the same way that everything else concerning Pyrgopolinices' valour is Atrotrogus' invention, express admiration for the soldier's manly splendour, particularly for the hallmark of his beauty: the women concentrate on the volume and the bright colour of the hair ('see his rich black hair (*caesaries*), how it becomes him!', *Mil. Gl.* 64). The soldier's hair, however, is not only black, but also long and wavy, and the combination of the two traits is a physiognomic *tour de force*. The 'leonine' tendencies the wavy hair indicates are confounded by the fact that on the first *episeistos* the lion's 'mane' is coloured with the black of cowardice, contrary to the more expressly leonine blondness of the second *episeistos* – still, it covers a manly complexion, as opposed to the feminine whiteness of the twin mask! This striking, polyvalent wavy hair of the *miles* becomes an even more entangled semiotic sign, as it has 'epic' and 'heroic' connotations (see further in the last section of this chapter). The women's supposed admiration for Pyrgopolinices, for that matter, is mentioned in the same reported conversation in which Artotrogus dubs his provider '*not Achilles, but eius frater*' (*Mil. Gl.* 62): with this jibe Artotrogus is underscoring a mock-epic frame of reference, which will be shown to have particular significance in the interplay between soldier and parasite.

Physiognomically speaking, then, the first *episeistos* is a typically contradictory mask of a New Comedy *neaniskos*, with all the

theatrical potential and all the possibilities for different constructions of the soldier that this unrolls. As explained in [Chapter 3](#), physiognomic readings do not rest on individual signs, but on overall impressions, which can be produced by ignoring some traits and foregrounding others. Thus, the Eleusinians in *Sikyonioi* choose to disregard Stratophanes' 'discordant' black hair, which is exactly the trait Atrotrogus' women single out, producing a different overall impression altogether. The soldier carries a narrative and a semiotic baggage conducive to an image of fierceness. A playwright could manipulate this image practically at will: to play it farcically, like Plautus does in the *Miles*, bringing forth the soldier's arrogance and cowardice, or, in a more contemplative manner, like Menander, exploring the upshots of the soldier's potential for vehement passion. Menander seems to have chosen to swing it to the side of gravity in the *Sikyonioi*, to sentimental excess in the *Misoumenos*, and to emotional and physical violence in the *Perikeiromene* (in this latter play apparently tweaking the effect further by employing the second rather than the first *episeistos*). Menander's soldiers may have not been the 'norm' of New Comedy, but they correspond closely to the semiotics of the *episeistos* masks. Such 'movements' of the type as evinced in Menander (all manifestations of various 'hypo-proairetic' kinds of conduct) are part and parcel of the *miles*; they belong inside, not outside, the character's semantic field. Stratophanes' outburst may be 'purged' because of the association with Moschion, but one cannot help but feel that it is excessive, indeed, a form of *akrasia* in the face of passion. His sentimentality is actually not significantly different from Polemon's or Thrasonides'; and such violence of emotion can be theatrically prefigured either by the 'heroic' physiognomy of the first *episeistos* or the 'leonine' temperament of the second.

The soldier and the parasite: *integumentum corporis*

Physiognomising, then, is a selective process. Not all sources of physiognomical information are given equal weight, but some are favoured over others. It is most important, however, to clarify that the determination of which signs are privileged on a physiognomy

is not random: it is the result of reading physiognomies in context, filtering them both through similar, usually antithetical, physiognomies and through other external determinants. The physiognomic input of Stratophanes' hair, for example, was 'silenced', as it were, by the presence of Moschion. In the examples expounded below, the value of the soldier's traits will be established by the presence of a parasite by his side. Just as important semiotically, however, and just as crucial for the debunking of the soldier, for example, in Plautus, is that the soldier comes complete with certain language, certain gear and, apparently, a typical set of movements, which determined the acting style required for the role. The *miles gloriosus* is prime evidence that a New Comedy character is not just a 'face', but a continuum of physiognomy, costume, (body) language and prop. These features are directly and constantly informing the mask in collaboration with the *prosōpa* with which the mask interfaces. Even if the soldier's military accoutrements are not flaunted on stage, they are always an essential part of the discourse that shapes the character. In Menander nonetheless, most notably in the *Misoumenos*, the soldier's sword is just as important a determinant of character as any other. Let us examine, then, how the mask relates syntagmatically with the signs around it in performance.

Menander seems to have preferred the kind of soldier narrative that utilised the soldier's shortcomings (vehemence, rashness, excessive emotion) as a different instantiation of the youth's immaturity. In the Roman examples we have, and in Menander's *Kolax* to the extent this play can be reconstructed, the narrative thrusts towards debunking the soldier's fierceness mainly by association with the parasite. The opening scene of Plautus' *Miles Gloriosus* (1–78) is quite characteristic of the interaction between the soldier and the parasite, of the transformative effect of the latter on the former.

Pyrgopolinices, the most clamorously and unabashedly 'stereotypical' *miles* at our disposal, comes forth swaggering about in long strides and in full military gear. He is wearing a cloak and carrying his *machaera*, a prop of the utmost symbolic (phallic) significance in the play. This sword, the soldier says, is

despondent, because it has not slaughtered anyone in a while (5–8). The lines are an obvious sexual double entendre: we can imagine the actor flourishing the sword suggestively. Pyrgopolinices' shield is carried on stage by an entourage of extras, whom the soldier orders to polish and shine it for the next glorious engagement. A few steps back in this impressive parade follows Artotrogus, the soldier's cheeky parasite, who holds writing material in his hands. These tablets are another prop that plays a central role in the construction of the soldier's character and the signification of his mask in this play.

The soldier, we argued, appropriates a register of heroism, which comes complete as a set of stories of heroic deeds. The soldier invites the spectator to read him against the backdrop of these stories. This textuality of the soldier comes out explicitly and self-reflexively in the beginning of Plautus' *Miles*.³⁵ With pen and 'paper' in hand, Artotrogus poses as Pyrgopolinices' historiographer, perhaps invoking the practice of the historians of Alexander, who followed the great military leaders on their campaigns. Artotrogus, though, unlike his historian 'colleagues', does not record, but invents exploits. The fictionality of Pyrgopolinices as Artotrogus' 'text' is further emphasised by the fact that this 'text' appears on stage *in statu scribendi*. Artotrogus *writes* Pyrgopolinices into a trajectory of fictional heroism, which the soldier readily arrogates to himself as genuine. The parasite's belly (*Mil. Gl.* 33) forces his mind to fabricate on the spot monstrously improbable feats of valour, in the battle as well as in the boudoir, and to implant them into the 'memory' of the soldier, who seems to know nothing about them, but of course accepts them all too keenly (*Mil. Gl.* 40ff.). Pyrgopolinices is staged as a character in the process of being written; his dependence on his 'author' establishes that 'Pyrgopolinices the text' does not exist independently of 'Artotrogus the writer'. In essence, what the parasite, whom the soldier hails as *poeta unicus*, practically writes is the soldier's role. Pyrgopolinices as text succumbs to Artotrogus' authorial control absolutely.

³⁵ Cf. also Frangoulidis (1994a) for Thraso as a storyteller in Terence's *Eunuchus*.

This is a powerful vindication of the complementarity of parasite and soldier, who operate as an indissoluble ensemble.

Similarly, in Plautus' *Asinaria*, the *cacula* of the soldier Diabolus composes the contract between the soldier and the pimp-mother of Philaenium (*Asin.* 746–8). Diabolus, whose name bespeaks a rather more wily nature (remember that the black hair of the mask denotes *polykerdeia*, crafty greed, as well), offers a certain degree of resistance to the parasite (Diabolus makes suggestions, which Parasitus accepts). Nevertheless, he, too, cannot be 'read' in isolation from the parasite. The parasite mask(s) can play independently of the *episeistos*; nevertheless, the soldier can seldom play disconnected from the parasite. Even Menander's soldiers, for instance Polemon and Stratophanes, most often come complete with their valets.

Corroborating the interdependence of the two masks is the fact that often in the play the soldier's *cacula* fills in for the soldier himself.³⁶ The *Bacchides* offers a compelling case in point. As the *cacula* of the soldier Cleomachus, the anonymous parasite comes to claim either the girl Bacchis or a refund. Crucially, the parasite presents himself as the soldier's *integumentum corporis* (601). An integument is a protective layer, like a soldier's armour or shield.³⁷ The role of the parasite in this scene is, in the manner of a breastplate, to absorb Pistoclerus' ire and keep it away from the soldier. But the *integumentum* plays also a more nuanced role.

³⁶ In the *Miles*, apart from Artotrogus, the slave Sceledrus is another analogue of the soldier in the first part of the play. Sceledrus, whose whole role revolves around chasing a monkey (*simia*), emblematises, exactly like the soldier, a process of *simulatio*, which rests on usurping discourses and playing roles. The soldier's bravado is dethroned as mere *pithēkizein*, pure imitation of the real thing (see Cleary 1972). Connors (2004) attempts to see this 'monkey business' in the *Miles* as an ironic 'metaliterary figure for Plautus' own Roman imitations and distortions of Greek Comedy'. That the monkey and the monkey business reflect on the soldier is a point missed by Connors. The slave Harpax in *Pseudolus* is another good example of a slave substituting for the soldier and reflecting his *ēthos*, not least with his telling name and his inane boasting (*Pseud.* 655), although there are unmistakable Plautine variations in the role and character of this *stratioticus nuntius* (603–3a de Melo).

³⁷ Nesselrath (1985: 41) compares Lucian, *De parasito*, 49: 'and the provider stood behind the parasite, and he, the parasite, covered him under his shield like Ajax covered Teucer, and when the arrows started flying about he exposed himself and protected him' (ὁ δὲ τρέφων αὐτὸν ὀπίσθεν ὑποτέτακται τῷ παρασίτῳ, κάκεινος αὐτὸν ὥσπερ ὁ Αἴας τὸν Τεῦκρον ὑπὸ τῷ σάκει καλύπτει, καὶ τῶν βελῶν ἀφιεμένων γυμνώσας ἑαυτὸν τοῦτον σκέπτει ...).

It provides a pre-emptive insight into the nature of the body he ‘protects’: ‘the man whose integument you are must be completely worthless!’ (*nequam esse oportet cui tu integumentum improbu’s*, *Bacch.* 602). The mask of the soldier is forestalled through the mask of the parasite. The *sufflatus* soldier (603) is debunked in anticipation: the effect of the parasite on the soldier mask is that of a nail on a balloon (*dirrumptus*, 603).

‘A mask is not primarily what it represents but what it transforms.’ In the examples quoted above the parasite mask is clearly the filter through which the spectator is supposed to read the soldier mask. The transformational agency is active for the parasite (the parasite transforms) and passive for the soldier (the soldier is transformed). The process reverses the hierarchical order between soldier and parasite. A typical component of the soldier–parasite sequence is the soldier who hides and the parasite who takes the lead (Gnatho in the *Eunuchus*);³⁸ the soldier who hesitates and the *cacula* who acts (Sosias in *Perikeiromene*); the soldier at a loss and the parasite at the initiative (Theron in the *Sikyonioidi*); the soldier who gestures towards action, but is stifled by the parasite (Parasitus in the *Asinaria*). One symbolic scene after another establishes that the self-serving, sardonic παράσιτος, who crawls to the boss but simultaneously exposes his insufficiency, is an inalienable constituent of the soldier’s feigned heroism, a layer, as it were, of the soldier himself, an *integumentum corporis*.

Kolax and parasitos: gendering the parasite masks

Now let us look more closely into the nature of this ‘filter’ for the soldier, the parasite, to understand the interaction of the two, and also the interaction between the two major parasite masks, the *kolax* and the *parasitos*, in their original context. For practical reasons I will exclude from the discussion the *sikelikos*, the ‘third

³⁸ Gnatho is the quintessential footman bossing the boss; however, Hueffner’s thesis (1894: 9ff.) that Gnatho’s words in *Eun.* 248 (*ego adeo hanc primus inveni viam*) indicate that Menander in his *Kolax* actually was the *prōtos heuretēs* of the pairing soldier–parasite is certainly ‘Überinterpretation’; cf. Nesselrath (1985: 109).

parasite', as Pollux is unforthcoming about him and there is no substantial other evidence thereon.³⁹ Here is the quote from Pollux. I underline the terms that carry the most physiognomical weight:

κόλας δὲ καὶ παρασίτος μέλανες, οὐ μὴν ἔξω παλαιίστρας, ἐπίγρυποι, εὐπαθεῖς· τῷ δὲ παρασίτῳ μᾶλλον κατέαγε τὰ ὦτα, καὶ φαιδρότερός ἐστίν, ὥσπερ ὁ κόλας ἀνατέταται κακοηθέστερον τὰς ὀφρῦς.

The flatterer and the parasite have dark complexions, and they are not alien to the wrestling-ground either;⁴⁰ their nose is rather hooked and they are prone to luxury. The parasite, on his part, has ears rather more fractured and is more jolly-looking, just like the flatterer's most distinctive peculiarity is that he] has raised eyebrows gesturing towards malice.

The terminology itself is interesting, but not unproblematic. In Old Comedy, *kolax* was an umbrella term covering both politically minded flatterers and *sykophantai* (like those populating many a play of Aristophanes, Eupolis or others), but also early manifestations of the common parasite type, like the *episitios* mentioned by Crates and Pherecrates.⁴¹ The terminological demarcation between *kolax* and *parasitos* was gradually established in the period of Middle Comedy, when the parasite

³⁹ Tylawsky (2002) is in the minority (cf. also: Pickard-Cambridge ²1988: 225) taking the *eikonikos* as a 'fourth' parasite. Navarre (1914: 15) is adamant and he must be right: 'ce personnage n'a rien de commun avec la gent parasitique'. Cf. also Darenberg and Saglio (1873–1919: 412, n. 6), s.v. 'Persona'. Recent scholarship on the *eikonikos* includes Lapini (1992: 88–91) and Mesturini (2001: 69–204).

⁴⁰ The phrase is notoriously difficult. Robert's explanation (1911: 59), I believe, is off the mark, as it equates dark hair not with cowardice, but with effeminacy: 'Der Schmeichler und der Parasit haben schwarzes Haar, sehen also wie Weichlinge aus, jedoch geht das nicht soweit, dass man ihnen nicht den Verkehr in der Palästra, deren Gerät sie ja auch als Attribut tragen, anmerkt.' Navarre (1914: 16) is more convincing, when he translates 'ne sont pas étrangers à la palestre', and recognises that between *μέλανες* and οὐ μὴν ... 'il y a donc, non pas opposition, mais relation directe d'effet en cause; et la particule μὴν sert à mettre en relief cette relation'. It seems to me best to take *ou mēn* in the sense 'nor again, not either' (cf. Denniston ²1954: 338–9): the parasite and *kolax* have the skin tone that would apply to the *palaistra* and they are not alien to the *palaistra* itself. The sense of antithesis with the traits that follow – that, despite their athletic countenance and lifestyle, they are still *eupatheis* – is thus clear. The *palaistra* attributes that parasites traditionally carry are the *stleggis* and the *lekythos*; cf. Pollux, 4.120: τοῖς δὲ παρασίτοις πρόσσεστι καὶ στλεγγίς καὶ λήκυθος, ὡς τοῖς ἀγροκόις λαγωβόλον.

⁴¹ Nesselrath (1985: 88–121). Cf. Athenaeus, vi 236e: 'early poets used the word *κόλας* to refer to parasites' (οἱ δ' ἀρχαῖοι ποιηταὶ τοὺς παρασίτους *κόλακας* ἐκάλουν).

emerged as a distinct type. Various playwrights were credited with ‘inventing’ the parasite, Araros or Alexis being the most plausible candidates.⁴² However, instances like Alexis, fr. 262 K.-A.,⁴³ Plutarch, *Mor.* 5b4–6,⁴⁴ or the fact that Aristotle and Plato largely use the word *kolax* to signify both ‘flatterer’ and ‘parasite’, probably show that the demarcation process was slow and perhaps never absolute.⁴⁵

But in any case, confining the distinction between *kolax* and *parasitos* to terminology can lead to misunderstandings. Already in Pollux’s designation of the *sikelikos* as the ‘third parasite’ (*kolax*, apparently, being the second), we see *parasitos* used as both a specific and a generic term (like the terms *neaniskos*, *pappos* or *therapōn*): *parasitos*, *kolax* and *sikelikos* are all varieties of the subgenus ‘parasite’. It is as a generic term that *parasitus* was passed on to Latin Comedy (and the Latin *didascaliae*). However, this need not be taken as an indicator that the demarcation between the two had broken down by the time of the Romans⁴⁶ – or, indeed, that it was never truly there in Greek comedy, Old, Middle or New, as is Brown’s contention. Before taking ‘*parasitos* and *kolax* as interchangeable terms to designate the same dramatic character’ (Brown 1992: 105), it is paramount to acknowledge what Brown fails to do: that, in New Comedy, the differentiation between *kolax* and *parasitos* was not primarily linguistic, but semiotic; not so much a matter of terminology as of mask. When the Prologue of Terence’s *Eunuchus* labels Gnatho as *parasitus colax* (*Eun.* 30), this is, I submit, not an instance of terminological confusion, but a double designation of the character’s genus or type (*parasitus*) and specific mask (*colax*).

⁴² See Arnott (1968).

⁴³ κóλακος δὲ βίος μικρὸν χρόνον ἀνθεῖ· ἰ οὐδεὶς γὰρ χαίρει πολιοκροτάφῳ παρασίτῳ (‘the flatterer flourishes for only a short while in life; for no one enjoys a parasite with grey sideburns’).

⁴⁴ κóλακος καὶ παρασίτους ἀναλαμβάνουσιν, ἀνθρώπους ἀσήμους καὶ καταράτους (‘they take up flatterers and parasites, worthless and accursed people’).

⁴⁵ See more examples in P. G. McC. Brown (1992: 99–100). Brown (1992: 102) dismisses Nesselrath’s distinction between *kolakes* and *parasitōi*, which postulates that the former are after money and power, whereas the latter are after only food. Equally schematic is Ribbeck’s (1883) dichotomy between flattery and service: Alexis, fr. 121 K.-A., shows clearly that what both types ‘do’ is an *agōn kolakeias*.

⁴⁶ Pace Damon (1997: 13–14).

A passage in Plutarch, possibly referring to Menander's *Kolax*⁴⁷ (*Mor.* 547c3ff. = *Kolax*, fr. 7 Arnott), provides a clue as to how one should read the difference between *kolax* and *parasitos*:

ἐνιοὶ μὲν οὖν κολακεύοντες αὐτοὺς ὥσπερ γαργαλίζουσιν καὶ φουσῶσιν, ἐνιοὶ δὲ κακοῦθως οἷόν τι δέλεαρ μικρὸν εὐλογίας ὑποβάλλοντες ἐκκαλοῦνται τὴν περιαι-
τολογίαν, οἱ δὲ προσπυνθάνονται καὶ διερωτῶσιν, ὥς παρὰ Μενάνδρῳ τὸν στρα-
τιώτην, ἵνα γελᾶσωσιν.

Some people in their attempt to flatter someone tickle and puff up their ego, as it were. Some others, though, maliciously, use a little bit of praise as bait, to cause their targets to start talking highly of their own selves, and the flatterers ask for more and pose questions, all with a view to a good laugh. This is what happens to the soldier in Menander.

Plutarch's *enioi men ... enioi de* corresponds to Pollux's two distinct 'types' of fawners, the second of which is explicitly branded as *kakoēthēs* (implying that the first is comparatively harmless). The first type excels in tickling and swelling up their 'victim's' vanity with adulatory talk. The second type comprises those who (a) use adulatory talk to entice their victims to start praising themselves in an obviously ridiculous fashion, and/or (b) spur on the dupe with further questions and demands for detail in order to enjoy a good malicious laugh. Gnatho in Terence's *Eunuch* is a clear manifestation of the second type of fawner, the *kakoēthēs*, who rather than being the laughing stock of others, becomes the ironist himself, cf. especially 248–54:

Est genus hominum qui esse primos se omnium rerum volunt
nec sunt: hos consector; hisce ego non paro me ut rideant,
sed eis ultro adrideo et eorum ingenia admiror simul. 250
quidquid dicunt laudo (compare Plutarch's εὐλογίας ὑποβάλλοντες)
id rursum si negant, laudo id quoque;
negat quis: nego; ait: aio; postremo imperavi egomet mihi
omnia assentari. is quaestus nunc est multo uberrimus.

There is a type of people who want to be first in everything, but they are not. These are the people I am after. I do not make myself *their* butt of fun; instead I am the one who ridicules them, while at the same time I express my admiration for their intellects. Whatever they say, I praise it; if they say the exact opposite

⁴⁷ On the controversy concerning *Kolax*, fr. 7 and 8 Arnott, see P. G. McC. Brown (1992).

after a while, I praise that, too. They say no, I say no; they say yes, I say yes. To cut a long story short, I have instructed myself to agree to everything. Nowadays this is by far the most lucrative profession.

Notice the double sense of *adsentari* in this passage: the verb means both ‘agree’ and ‘kolakeuein’. Gnatho puts his ‘method’ into practice in *Eun.* 391ff., where with continuous prodding he urges the soldier to narrate his ridiculous stories. This may be the dramatic situation also in Antiphanes, fr. 200 K.-A. This malicious laughter, which debunks the victim, is apparently what constitutes the *kakoētheia* of the second type, whereas the first type of fawner prefers to do good to his own self rather than harm his victim.

With these Plutarchean distinctions in mind, let us return to Pollux. Pollux’s unique treatment of these masks suggests that they are closely intertwined. The masks in Pollux’s catalogue share a dark complexion, a hooked nose and a proneness to indulgence and luxury. A spectator would distinguish the parasite from the flatterer by looking at the fractured ears and the jolly expression on the parasite (the first being perhaps the result of receiving regular beatings), as opposed to the *kolax*’s malicious look. A certain *phaidrotēs* may also have been a trait of the *kolax* mask; the flatterer, though, because of his raised eyebrows, manifests a duplicity and craftiness quite distinct from the parasite’s pathetic voluptuousness. Although their shared capital of *eupatheia* makes food a top priority for both (and voraciousness a common, if variously accentuated, trait), Pollux’s *parasitos* seems to tilt more towards the harmless, buffoonish sort, whereas the *kolax* rather approximates to the *servus callidus* mould: *malitia*, that is, *kakoētheia*, was the hallmark of the *servus callidus*.⁴⁸

The examples from the plays themselves seem to fit this pattern very well. Parasites like Ergasilus (Plautus, *Captivi*), Gelasimus (*Stichus*), Peniculus⁴⁹ (*Menaechmi*) or Saturio (*Persa*) are a rather

⁴⁸ Cf. W. S. Anderson (1993: 88–106); Blume (1997).

⁴⁹ A close parallel between *Menaechmi* and *Asinaria* emphasises Peniculus’ haplessness. Peniculus’ and Diabolus’ parasite inform on the adulterous *amator* as a reaction to what they perceive in each case as cheating against them. While, however, Parasitus achieves, or hopes to achieve, a settlement like that won by Gnatho in Terence’s *Eunuchus* (for

passive and needy lot, whose hunger either remains unsatisfied or is granted satisfaction by a stroke of luck.⁵⁰ Contrast this bunch with the six valets of *milites* in Plautus and Terence:⁵¹ Gnatho (Terence *Eunuchus*), Artotrogus (*Miles Gloriosus*), Parasitus (*Asinaria*), Harpax (*Pseudolus*), Parasitus (*Bacchides*) and Curculio (*Curculio*), although the latter only acts the role of a soldier's *cacula* in a ruse to hoodwink a *miles*.⁵² Contrast also Phormio in Terence's play of that title, who may be the *adjuvant* of an *adulescens*,⁵³ but his role comes very close to Menander's parasite Theron (*Sik.*): both resort to perjury in order to achieve the marriage that their young patrons desire.⁵⁴ The roles of these cunning, manipulative, aggressive parasites are clearly at odds with the helpless desperation of Ergasilus or Gelasimus, who struggle in a state of lethal dependency. Always with the due caution I argue that the

Diabolus to share in Philaenium's graces, *Asin.* 912ff.), Peniculus' gesture earns him total expulsion from Menaechmus' household (*Men.* 665–7).

⁵⁰ On the discomfiture of Gelasimus in Plautus' *Stichus*, see Owens (2000). On Ergasilus, see Leach (1969). In *Capt.* 78–83, Ergasilus finds himself, in the absence of his masters, as powerless as a snail in the heat, which 'lacking dew ... must live off his own moisture' (Leach 1969: 288). On Ergasilus' ineffectuality even at the time of his triumph, see also McCarthy (2000: 182–6, 195–8). McCarthy emphasises the distance between Ergasilus and the *servus callidus*, 'whom he might seem to emulate' (p. 195) in an attempt to alleviate his desperation, though he fails to do so (cf. 778–89). In the end, Tyche secures for Ergasilus what human cleverness affords the scheming slave.

⁵¹ There is uncertainty about the number of parasites featuring in Menander's *Kolax*. Terence's *Eunuchus* has only one parasite, but the actual Menandrian fragments show possible signs of two, Gnathon and Strouthias. It is possible that the names refer to a single person (Kuiper 1932; Pernertorfer 2009), who used an alias (like Curculio–Summanus) or a nickname (like Ergasilus–Scortum or Gelasimus–Miccotrogus). It is also possible, though, that Gnathon and Strouthias are not one but two distinct parasites: Strouthias attached to the soldier Bias, and Gnathon to the young lover Pheidias (a reported suggestion by Wilamowitz). Arnott (1996b: 158) actually postulates 'a plot in which the two rival lovers were encouraged by their more imaginative lackeys into schemes aimed at winning the *hetaira* from the pimp by force or trickery'. For discussion and bibliography, see Pernertorfer (2009: 31–40).

⁵² Curculio poses as the soldier's delegate bearing the *anulus* stolen from the soldier's finger (371ff.). Harpax in the *Pseudolus* and the Parasite in the *Bacchides* behave in a very similar way.

⁵³ On Greimas' actantial model see Greimas (1966).

⁵⁴ Phormio is the character in whom the connection of parasitical obsequiousness and juridical shenanigans point to the original co-extension of *parasitos*, *kolax* and *sykophantēs*, cf. Siess (1907: 293); Lofberg (1920); Norwood (1923: 76); Godsey (1928–9); Segal and Moulton (1978); Damon (1997: 90ff.). One wonders also whether the Roman *scurra* reflects this proto-parasite as well. On the *scurra*, cf. Corbett (1986).

Of mice and (young) men

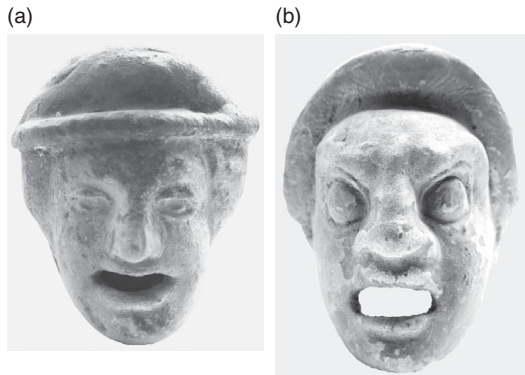


Figure 4.2 (a) *Parasitos* mask from Lipari (inv. 11186);
(b) *Kolax* mask from Lipari (inv. 11289)

kolax mask, which merges voluptuousness and mischief, would suit the *cacula*⁵⁵ much better than the *parasitos*.

Let us now examine further the physiognomy of the *kolax* in juxtaposition with that of the *parasitos* bringing in the material evidence available.

The calm forehead of the mask on the left provides a good starting point. Pollux does not mention the calm forehead as a trait of the *parasitos*; it can be safely assumed, however, from the contrast Pollux implies between the flatterer's raised eyebrows, which can create a 'cloud' on the forehead, and the obvious absence of this trait on the parasite (Figure 4.2(a)). The opposition calm/cloudy forehead can mark a significant divergence between the *kolax* and the *parasitos* in the mechanism of *kolakeia*: to the malignant cunning of the *kolax* the *parasitos* juxtaposes a blatant, canine-like fawning,⁵⁶ cf. [Arist.] *Phgn.* 811b36–8:

⁵⁵ There are also two slave *caculae* in Menander (Sosias of *Perikeiromene* and Getas of *Misoumenos*), who behave in ways more nuanced, certainly, but not starkly dissimilar. Daos of *Aspis* is a special case. He is the follower of a *neaniskos*, but Kleostratos is also a professional soldier in the play, and the opening scene highlights that role exactly.

⁵⁶ In Xenophon, *Mem.* 2.9 (which provides an 'aetiology of patronage', as it were), the hired services of the poor orator Archdemus, the proto-parasite, are compared with the keeping of dogs. Cf. Ergasilus' self-description in Plautus, *Capt.* 85–7: *prolatis rebus parasiti venatici | sumus, quando res redierunt, molossici | odiosicique et multum inmodestici* ('on holiday, we parasites are hunting dogs; when things return to

οἱ δ' ἄτενές [sc. μέτωπον] ἔχοντες κόλακες· ἀναφέρεται ἐπὶ τὸ γιγνόμενον πάθος. ἴδοι δ' ἂν τις ἐπὶ τῶν κυνῶν, ὅτι οἱ κύνες, ἐπειδὴν θωπεύωσι, γαληνές τὸ μέτωπον ἔχουσιν.

People who have stretched foreheads are flatterers; the standard of reference is the emotion involved in the act. One could see the same thing on dogs; for dogs, when they fawn on somebody, have a calm forehead.

Suggestively, the same Greek verb, *sainein*, means ‘wag my tail’, ‘fawn’ and ‘deceive’.

The parasite has a stretched, that is, calm, unwrinkled forehead. If we trust the terracotta mask (Figure 4.2(b)), it also seems to have a fairly large forehead, too. The impression of a large forehead depends essentially on the shape of the hair: if the hair falls on the forehead, it makes it look ‘smaller’; if the hair recedes, the forehead looks larger. Pollux provides no indication on the parasite’s hair: the parasite masks found at Lipari manifest at least two different hairstyles. The majority of examples recorded by Bernabò Brea, however, display a clean and rather large frontal region. On the other hand, a large forehead may also, to some extent, be an optical illusion created by the absence of wrinkling, which fragments the forehead, as it were. A ‘calm forehead’ may presuppose – or, at least, it certainly does not preclude – the impression of a ‘large forehead’.

A large-foreheaded man is characterised, according to the physiognomists, by bovine sluggishness, physical and by extension mental:⁵⁷ ‘those who have a very large forehead are sluggish; the reference is to oxen’ (οἱ δὲ μέγα ἄγαν [sc. μέτωπον] ἔχοντες νωθροί· ἀναφέρεται ἐπὶ τοῦς βοῦς, [Arist.] *Phgn.* 811b29–30). The ‘cloudy’ (hence smaller-looking) forehead of the *kolax*, on the other hand, connotes the opposite of sluggishness, a self-confident subject, who ‘takes a liking to himself’: ‘people with gloomy-looking foreheads are self-satisfied; the reference is to bulls and

normal, we are Molossians, quite disagreeable and unpleasant’). In the *Menaechmi*, Peniculus is asked to ‘use his nose like a bloodhound’ (Damon 1997: 65), in order to sniff the stolen *palla*.

⁵⁷ The parasite’s wit, his ability to be *ridiculus*, was his stock in trade (*Capt.* 469ff.). Gelasimus was pre-emptively named after this ability (174–5). Bathos is created, nevertheless, when the parasites reveal that the source of their jibes are ready-made anthologies of humour (*Pers.* 392ff., *Stich.* 221ff.), not genuine quick-wittedness.

lions' (οἱ δὲ συννεφεῖς ἔχοντες αὐθάδεις· ἀναφέρεται ἐπὶ ταῦρον καὶ λέοντα, [Arist.] *Phgn.* 811b34–5).⁵⁸ The leonine association will find its equivalent in the wavy hair of the soldier – but let us postpone that discussion for later. For now, let us notice how the physiognomics of the forehead (size + presence/absence of muscle movement, two intertwined categories) sets up a clear binary opposition between the *kolax* and the *parasitos*:

Large/calm forehead: νωθρός
Animal equivalency: βοῦς

Small/cloudy forehead: αὐθάδης
Animal equivalency: ταῦρος/λέων

The animal equivalency here is key, as it differentiates the sluggish oxen and the self-assertive bull. *Bous* can refer to both sexes of cattle; in this case, however, in the strong sense that the male is set apart, *bous* is essentially feminised. The result is that the contrast produced between *bous* and *tauros* genders the parasite masks: the *kolax* is the ‘masculine’, the *parasitos* the ‘feminine’ subtype of practically one and the same *ēthos*. A parasite’s relationship with his patron is based, as James Davidson points out, on *trephein*. This is also the Greek term used to describe the relations between a slave and his master (*trephōn* being another term for *kektēmenos*), but also a man’s ‘husbandry’ of his wife.⁵⁹ ‘A kept man, like the drones in a hive, is rendered less masculine

⁵⁸ A similar set of contrasts can be found in another pair of masks, the *hēgemōn presbytēs* and the *presbytēs makropōgōn kai episeiōn*. Unlike the *hēgemōn presbytēs* who raises his right eyebrow, the *presbytēs makropōgōn kai episeiōn* ‘οὐκ ἀνατέταται τὰς ὀφρὺς’, hence he is νωθρός τὴν ὄψιν.

⁵⁹ ‘Man and woman’ or ‘whore’ and ‘whore-keeper’ were the sexual terms whereby the politician Pamphilos lambasted the political dependency of the parasite-politician Timarchus on his patron Hegesander (Aeschin. *In Tim.* 110–11). On this, cf. J. A. Davidson (1997: 273): ‘it is the visible relationship of intimacy and dependency, of dining at a patron’s house, that accounts in the first place for the gender roles and sexual roles assigned to them . . . A parasite hangs around his political friend so much that it’s almost as if he has moved in with him. This is . . . the basis for insinuations of sexual subordination, “prostitution” or marriage.’ A few obvious parallels of parasitic meretriciousness in Plautus would have served Davidson’s argument very well. In these comic cases, the parasite’s willingness to succumb is explicitly articulated: (a) in *Captivi*, Ergasilus bears the nickname *Scortum*, ‘whore’ (*Capt.* 69–76); (b) in *Persa*, Saturio is willing to sell himself to the pimp Dordalus, as long as he is *satur*. Willing to sell himself also is Gelasimus (*Stich.* 171–2, 193–5).

by his being kept.’⁶⁰ In the interface with the soldier, the supposed alpha male, it is the ‘masculine’ *kolax* rather than the ‘feminine’ *parasitos* that seems able to produce more theatrical nuance.⁶¹

Face off: viewing the *episeistos* against the *kolax*

οὐ φιλέω μέγαν στρατηγὸν οὐδὲ διαπεπλιγμένον
οὐδὲ βοστρύχοισι γαῦρον οὐδ’ ὑπεξυρμένον . . .

Archilochus, fr. 114 West(= 114 Gerber)

In light of the discussion above, the strong possibility that the *kolax*, not the *parasitos*, was the mask of choice for representing the soldier’s aide-de-camp is strengthened, I believe, by Alexis, fr. 121 K.-A. The *persona loquens* here is a parasite of ‘the common genus of Comedy’. The target of his harangue is a second, presumably novel, kind of flatterer. The two of them perform the same function, a *kolakeias agōn*. What sets them apart is their *ēthos*, the people they sponge upon, and the measure of their respective success:

- A. δὴ ἔστι, Ναυσίνικε, παρασίτων γένη·
 ἐν μὲν τὸ κοινὸν καὶ κεκωμωδημένον,
 οἱ μέλανες ἡμεῖς· θάτερον ζητῶ γένος,
 σεμποπαράσιτον ἐκ μέσου καλούμενον,
 σατράπας παρασίτους καὶ στρατηγούς ἐπιφανεῖς
 ὑποκρινόμενον εὖ τοῖς βίοις, ὄφρυς ἔχον
 χιλιοταλάντους ἀνακυλῖόν τ’ οὐσίας.
 νοεῖς σὺ τὸ γένος καὶ τὸ πρᾶγμα; NAY. καὶ μάλα.
- A. τούτων ἑκατέρου τῶν γενῶν ὁ μὲν τύπος
 τῆς ἐργασίας εἷς ἐστι, κολακείας ἀγών·
 ὥσπερ ἐπὶ τῶν βίων δέ, τοὺς μὲν ἡ τύχη
 ἡμῶν μεγάλοις προσένειμε τοὺς δ’ ἐλάττωσιν,
 εἴθ’ οἱ μὲν εὐποροῦμεν οἱ δ’ ἀλύομεν.⁶²

⁶⁰ J. A. Davidson (1997: 272).

⁶¹ The semiotic approach thus largely confirms Ribbeck’s verdict, that although the *parasitos* sponged on civilian patrons, the *kolax* depended upon soldiers (Ribbeck 1883: 21). Ribbeck was followed by Wüst and Hug (1949). Nevertheless, one should avoid schematisation. The *Sycophanta* in Plautus’ *Trinummus*, for instance, a character hired by a citizen, may well be intended for the *kolax* mask.

⁶² Compare, once more, Gnatho’s entrance monologue in Terence’s *Eunuchus*, where the same point is made from the opposite point of view: Thraso’s *cacula* distinguishes himself, who obviously εὐπορεῖ, from the destitute parasite he bumps into on the street.

Of mice and (young) men

A: Nausinicus, there are two types of parasite. The first is the common kind, often seen in comedy, that is, dark-skinned parasites like us. But I am enquiring into that other type, the one people call the mighty parasite, [who spend their lives acting the role of kings and satraps very well?],⁶³ having brows worth a thousand talents and squandering whole fortunes. Do you understand what type of people and behaviour I am talking about?

NAU: Very well in fact.

A: The occupation of both these types is the same: a contest in flattery. But as is the case with life itself, some of us are blessed with great fortune, others with minimum, and then some of us fare well, while others live at their wit's end.

To the extent that such comic utterances can be trustworthy guides to comic theatrical history, Alexis' fragment is valuable. Although it cannot be dated even loosely – Alexis' career was exceptionally long and it coincided with Menander's for several years – it offers strong indications that by the last quarter of the fourth century BC at the latest the parasite had crystallised two different subtypes (*genē*) and apparently two different masks. The hallmark of the second genus, the *semparassitos*, was the raised eyebrow. I think we can safely identify this second version with Pollux's *kolax*.⁶⁴

It is interesting, I argue in the following paragraphs, that the overall impression produced by the *kolax* is of an *ēthos* not altogether dissimilar from the *ēthos* of the soldier: conceit and self-indulgence, lust and machismo. As far as semiotic baggage is concerned, the *miles* does not vary much from his scrounger, and this fact already punctures the haughty knight, as soldier and *kolax* face off on stage. If the 'masculine' *kolax* feminises the *parasitos* in juxtaposition, he completely deflates the soldier, too.

Let us look at the *kolax* mask more closely, starting with its most stand-out feature, the eyebrows. In the Alexis fragment, the physiognomic and ethological implications of the raised eyebrows

⁶³ The text is uncertain here; see Arnott (1996a: 338–9 *ad loc.*).

⁶⁴ We may have an extra piece of evidence confirming this association preserved in the pictorial record. In Margarete Bieber's reconstruction (Bieber ²1961: 99, fig. 371), a wall painting found in the Casa della grande Fontana in Pompey shows a fierce, gigantic, muscular soldier approached by a much shorter, unsightly, asymmetrical man with fleshy, awkward legs and excitable gestures. If you look at the mask, the raised eyebrows are quite easy to distinguish.

are captured by the adjective *chiliotalantous*, which implies arrogance and perhaps greed. Physiognomic theory in fact gave a double edge to the sign: malice on the one hand, superciliousness on the other, cf. Pollux, 2.49:

καὶ τὰς ὀφρῦς αἶρων ὁ ὑπερήφανος, καὶ πάλιν τὰς ὀφρῦς ἀνασπῶν ἢ τὰς ὀφρῦς αἰωρῶν ἢ τὰς ὀφρῦς ἀνέλκων, ἢ τὰς ὀφρῦς ἀνατείνων ὑπὲρ τὰ νέφη.⁶⁵

The expression ‘the man who raises his eyebrows’ means the haughty man. Synonymous expressions are ‘the man who pulls up his eyebrows’, or ‘hangs his eyebrows’, or ‘draws up his eyebrows’, or ‘stretches up his eyebrows beyond the clouds’.

The hooked nose points to the same direction; cf. Anon. Med. Phgn. 6: ‘a nose that looks like that of a hawk (i.e. *epigrypos*) is the sign of a man who is in love with power and arrogant and stupid and self-absorbed’ (ὅς ἱερακοειδὴς σημεῖον φιλάρχου καὶ ἀλαζόνος καὶ μωροῦ καὶ φιλάυτου). More pointedly, a hooked nose could be read as a token of shamelessness (*anaideia*),⁶⁶ which is an inalienable component of *alazoneia*: cf. [Arist.] Phgn. 811a34–5: ‘people who have a hooked nose that starts right from their forehead are shameless: it is referred to the raven’ (οἱ ἐπίγρυπτον ἀπὸ τοῦ μετώπου εὐθύς ἀγομένην ἀναιδεῖς· ἀναφέρεται ἐπὶ τοῦς κόρακας).

Thus, raised eyebrows and hooked nose together transfer onto the *kolax* the same ethical traits that the wavy locks (*cincinnatus*, Mil. Gl. 923) and the fierce expression register on the soldier: *alazoneia* and *authadeia*, braggadocio and self-complacency. The soldier’s wavy hair is ‘referred’ (*anapheretai*) to the archetype of the lion, which suggests a passionate character, prone to violence. The *kolax* is characterised by a similar intensity, only in his case it is manifested as a malicious drive for trickery and cunning suggested by the ‘cloudiness’ of his forehead, cf. Adam. Phgn. 1.6: ‘if he also divides his forehead in half by raising his eyebrows,

⁶⁵ Compare also Anon. Med. Phgn. 2: ‘eyebrows hanging in the air are a sign of haughtiness; brows raised too often are a sign of vanity’ (ὀφρύες μετάρσιοι σημεῖον ὑψηλοφροσύνης. ὀφρύες συχνάκις ὑψούμεναι τῦφον δηλοῦσι).

⁶⁶ *Anaideia* was already associated with a parasitic prototype by Archilochus, fr. 124b W. (= 124 Gerber): ‘you have not come as an invited friend; your belly has led your mind and wits to shamelessness’ (οὐδὲ μὲν κληθεῖς <υ>Χ> ἦλθες οἷα δὴ φίλος. | ἀλλὰ σεο γαστήρ νόον τε καὶ φρένας παρήγαγεν | εἰς ἀναιδείην).

then this man is prone to trickery' (εἰ δὲ καὶ τὸ μέτωπον ἄμα ταῖς ὀφρύσι σπῶν εἰς τὸ μέσον, κερδαλεώτερός ἐστιν ὁ ἀνὴρ).

Another hallmark feature of the soldier, lust, is inscribed on the *kolax* through a different physiognomic channel. The *epigrypos* nose also bestows upon the *kolax*, apart from *anaideia*, certain sensuality, albeit rather discreet, since in the specimens we possess the nose is not particularly long. An oblique view at some characters from other, not altogether unrelated traditions, can be telling. The 'unambiguously phallic'⁶⁷ connotations of a long nose, a projection of a character's superlative carnality, are especially obvious in such farcical figures as Maccus of the *Atellana*, or Pantalone, Pulcinella and Il Capitano⁶⁸ of the *Commedia dell'arte*, or indeed in Karaghiozis of Modern Greek and Turkish shadow theatre (Karagöz). In these figures, all of whom are more or less *alazones* of some sort,⁶⁹ as well as 'strongly inclined to sensual or epicurean gluttony',⁷⁰ the long, hooked nose serves 'as the keynote to their character'.⁷¹ In association with other evidently phallic props, which recur on the ancient *miles* too, such as the dagger, the nose on these modern characters seems to function as a surrogate penis, a transposition, perhaps, of the old leather phallus, which, in a significant over-determination, could still be visible on them sometimes.⁷² To be sexually presumptuous is part of the soldier's role in New Comedy, not of his *cacula*;⁷³

⁶⁷ Rudlin (1994: 121).

⁶⁸ The phallic character of the nose was more pronounced in El Matamoros, the Spanish version of the Capitano.

⁶⁹ Pantalone's ancestor, Il Magnifico ('The Magnificent' or 'The Munificent'), whom Dario Fo famously called 'a Beelzebub of sex', 'puts on the mask and parades up and down in a series of a showily self-important struts, trips, trots and sudden halts' (Fo 1991: 67). The pose is directly reminiscent of the parade of various New Comedy *alazones*, and indeed of Pyrgopolinices himself. On the various transformations of *alazoneia* in Comedy see also Gil (1981–3).

⁷⁰ Duchartre (1966) 215. Duchartre uses the phrase specifically for Pulcinella, a character believed to derive from both Maccus and Bucco of the *Atellana*: see Duchartre (1966) 208–9.

⁷¹ Duchartre (1966) 229.

⁷² Cf. Duchartre (1966: 188): 'During the 16th century, Pantaloon almost always carried a huge dagger and purse at his belt, while underneath the shameless phallus, doubtless a survival from the theatre of antiquity, was quite visible.' See also Rudlin (1994: 92): 'Early form [of Pantalone] often has a phallic codpiece.'

⁷³ Menander's Theron who, according to Pollux's testimony (4.119), winds up married in the end (apparently to Malthake), is the closest Comedy gets to a parasite with love

yet paradoxically, it is on the *cacula*, not on the soldier, that a shameless sexual appetite is physiognomically inscribed. It seems that the ethical traits of the soldier are being ironically ‘transposed’ either to his valet or to the inanimate objects he is carrying. This is a definite first ‘move’ in the process of denuding the soldier from the gravitas he pretends to possess.

Two scenes from Plautus’ *Miles Gloriosus* illustrate the point quite well. The first is Pyrgopolinices’ pathetic apostrophe to his *machaera* in the opening scene (5–8):

nam ego hanc machaeram mihi consolari volo,
ne lamentetur neve animum despondeat,
quia se iam pridem feriatam gestitem,
quae misera gestit et fartem facere ex hostibus.

I want to console my sword, so that it neither grieves nor is despondent. I have been dragging it around idle for a while now, the poor thing, which longs to make mincemeat out of my enemies!

Love and war, the two strands of the soldier’s action (or inaction, since this version of the soldier makes neither love nor war!) are splendidly integrated in the trope of the idle *machaera*, which hangs futile and redundant from the soldier’s hand. The sword’s function as a piece of weaponry and as a surrogate penis⁷⁴ is put across unambiguously by the charged, passionate language (*lamentetur, animum despondeat, gestit*), which suggests desperate romantic longing (a feature that will be picked up later by the Roman elegists). The deflation begins when the spectator realises that, in the *kolax*’s case, this surrogate penis is an inalienable property of the mask (the hooked nose), whereas in the soldier sexual effectiveness

interests (quite insistent, in fact, given Malthake’s indignation), although this may well be an accident of tradition. For his salaciously pederastic parasite Gnathon, for whom drunken lust is a stock in trade (*Daphnis and Chloe*, 4.11.2), Longus may be capitalising precisely on the physiognomy of the New Comedy *kolax* mask (on Longus’ Gnathon, see Hunter 1983: 69–71).

⁷⁴ A weapon doubling as a penis substitute is a spectacle that comic playwrights have rarely been able to resist. Two ready and well-known examples are the Lamachos scene in Aristophanes’ *Acharnians* (esp. 591–2) and, arguably, the Amazon scene in the Charition mime (6 Cunningham). In the Charition mime, the masculine energy of Amazons carrying *toxika* symbolically transfers upon them the penis that the effeminate barbarians have relinquished.

is an additive that can be easily stripped away to the soldier's utter shame (*Mil. Gl.* 1423) – and indeed it will be at the end of the play.

A similar mechanism (transference) debunks Pyrgopolinices' dazzling eyes. These eyes supposedly overwhelmed Acroteleutium when she caught a glimpse of that son of Venus herself (*Mil. Gl.* 1257–65). Yet it is not Pyrgopolinices' eyes that dazzle, but his shield as it is being polished by his slaves (*Mil. Gl.* 1–4). This, too, the power to dazzle his victims out of their wits, is an artificial property extraneous to the soldier himself, as fictitious as all his other 'entitlements'. That the soldier does not even carry the shield himself, but has the slaves do it enhances the dislocation effect.

In the punishment scene (*Mil. Gl.* 1394ff.), prop and language turn the tables on Pyrgopolinices: the soldier's sword has become a butcher's carving knife (*culter*) eyeing avidly the soldier's bowels and mostly his testicles, in language directly reminiscent of the 'sentiments' of the *machaera*: *quin iamdudum gestit* (sc. the knife) *moecho hoc abdomen adimere* (*Mil. Gl.* 1398). Hammond *et al.* (1963: 204) make an interesting comment on this line: they imagine that Cario 'sticks the point of his knife at Pyrgopolinices' lower belly'. True or not, this would be an excellent piece of theatre, underscoring the connection between *machaera*, *culter* and Pyrgopolinices' penis, which the knife is now threatening to cut off. Pyrgopolinices is completely stripped of his masculinity here, almost literally.

This constant dislocation of masculinity from character to prop, from the ethical to the simulated, is of fundamental importance for the soldier mask, borne out clearly as the *epi-seistos* interacts with his symbiotic *kolax*. Among other things it underpins the histrionic element inherent in this figure. The whole symbiosis of soldier and parasite has a histrionic basis (both of them enact roles in full consciousness of their artificiality), further highlighted by the *kolax*'s constant acknowledgment of the spectators through asides. In the Alexis fragment, the metatheatricality of the language comes out explicitly: the new kind of parasite, says the *persona loquens*, is the *gloriosus* of the parasite-folk, the *semparassitos*, who by accompanying

satrapas and *stratēgous epiphaneis*⁷⁵ subsumes much of their essence. The *kolax*'s appropriation of a register originally befitting the soldier is underlined by a 'theatrical' verb: *hypokrinomai*, Latin *simulare*. Much of the imagery in the *Miles Gloriosus* seeks to establish that being a soldier is all about *simulare*; as it turns out, being a soldier's *cacula* is naturally all about *simulare* as well.⁷⁶

Lust, arrogance and self-importance: the *kolax* communicates the essence of the soldier's *ēthos*, but through distinct physiognomic channels. The process seems odd, but it serves to emphasise more strongly – and to transform more fundamentally – the basic trait that they share: the darkness of their skin. Being *melas* epitomises both of the soldier's primary claims, bravery and masculine valour. We saw at the beginning of this chapter that in physiognomic theory the darkness of skin ranges between the categories of 'dark' and 'too dark'. Both the *kolax* and the soldier are *melanes*. Amid clear signs of *eupatheia* and dissimulation, there is no question that the manliness of the *kolax* is fake: it manifests itself as an aggressive pursuit of gain and self-gratification, as opposed to the passivity and ineffectuality of the 'feminine' *parasitos*, but it has no genuine claim on the narratives of ἀνδρεία. The interface of *kolax* and *episeistos* in performance dislodges the soldier, too, from the brave and masculine *melas* to the cowardly and (sexually) ineffectual *agan melas*. A physiognomic feature that seems puzzling in isolation is given particular, ironic meaning in juxtaposition.

By means of juxtaposition and contrast, the interplay of soldier and *kolax* on the New Comedy stage serves as a mechanism of anticlimax: the *kolax* dethrones the soldier from his falsified

⁷⁵ The text here is unfortunately corrupt. Arnott (1996a), *ad fr.* 121, suggests that the reference may be to men who sponge on generals or satraps, or to the generals and satraps themselves, who hang on foreign rulers in ways clearly reminiscent of parasites. The two options need not be mutually exclusive. The soldier–patron is often insinuated in comedy as being somebody else's parasite, indeed a king's. In Latin Comedy, *rex* signifies both a king, such as the Hellenistic monarchs hiring mercenaries, and also a parasite's patron: cf. Harsh (1936); Damon (1997: 85, n. 15).

⁷⁶ Aristophon, fr. 5 K.-A., and Antiphanes, fr. 193 K.-A., provide further examples of parasitic bluster. Relevant also is the case of Chaereas in Men. *Dysk.* 57–68: he swaggers onto the stage blowing the horn of his own machismo, only to get away as fast as he can when the rough ride begins (135ff.).

pedestal; to repeat the *Bacchides* metaphor, the *kolax* is the nail that bursts that inflated balloon (*Bacch.* 603). The soldier, who poses as ‘this violent and warlike fellow of ours’ (ὁ σοβαρὸς ἡμῶν ἀρτίως καὶ πολεμικός, *Men. Perik.* 172), who can huff and puff and bring your house down,⁷⁷ is exposed as being at least as *ridiculus* as his much brainier sponge. The semantic slide of the word *sobaros* in *Perikeiromene* is analogous with the deflation of the soldier himself: from ‘imposing’ to ‘swaggering’, ‘pompous’ and ‘haughty’.

The soldier between ‘high’ and ‘low’

We have talked extensively about the continuity of mask, costume and prop in the case of the soldier. Acting style is also important. In the real-time of performance, after all, the masks, the props that complement them and the bodies that animate them within a symbolic space and in association with other bodies merge in an organic whole. The debunking of the soldier is played out simultaneously on a multitude of semiotic fronts. A passage in Quintilian (*Inst. Or.* 11.3.112), for instance, suggests that attached to the pair soldier–parasite was a prescription to enact by way of movement the bathos that the *kolax* achieves with respect to his high-flown provider:

in fabulis iuvenum senum militum matronarum gravior ingressus est, servi ancillulae parasiti piscatores citatius moventur.

In the plays the gait of young men, old men, soldiers and matrons is more dignified, whereas slaves, little maids, parasites and fishermen move faster.

In the *Miles*, as mentioned, this distance in the *gravitas* of the gait is evident in the opening sequence of the play. The following brief example brings forth the importance of space in connection with intertextual discourse, which will be the focus of this last

⁷⁷ Cf. the words of Sosias in *Men. Perik.* 388–9: ‘We will storm this wretched house in a jiffy!’ (κατὰ κράτος τὸ δυστυχὲς οἰκίδιον τοῦτ’ αὐτίκ’ ἐξαιρήσομεν). Cf. also *Ter. Eun.* 773–4: (Thr. ‘First I will take the house by storm.’ Gn. ‘Right.’ Thr. ‘I will snatch the girl.’ Gn. ‘Very well!’ Thr. ‘I will beat up the mistress badly.’ Gn. ‘Very nice indeed!’ (Thr. primum aedis expugnabo. Gn. recte. Thr. virginem eripiam. Gn. probe. Thr. male mulcabo ipsam. Gn. Pulchre).

section. The soldier, we said repeatedly in this chapter, is a type that *makes claims*. In the case of Pyrgopolinices, one of these claims is being the son of Venus (*Mil. Gl.* 1265). The statement resonates in a variety of ways in the *Miles Gloriosus*, not least in specifically Roman terms.⁷⁸ The most visually impressive of these resonances, however, depends, one might say, on a literal reading of this allegation. What does it mean to be the son of a god, a *semidivus*? It means to exist at the borderline between the mortal and the divine, between earth and heaven. When the scene of Pyrgopolinices' punishment (1394ff.) begins, the first exchange runs as follows:

(Peric.): Ducite istum; si non sequitur, rapite sublimen foras, facite inter terram
atque caelum ut siet, discindite.

(Pyrg.): Obsecro hercle, Periplectomene, te.

(Peric.): Nequiquam hercle obsecras.

(Peric.): Take him away; if he does not follow on his own accord, carry him off inside in your arms, make sure that he is in-between earth and heaven, cut him to pieces.

(Pyrg.): By Hercules, I beseech you, Pericleptomenus!

(Peric.): Your entreaties are in vain.

No stage directions advise whether Pericleptomenus' order is observed by his slaves or not, but I cannot see how and why such a spectacle-minded playwright as Plautus could resist the visual extravaganza of a mighty and presumably massive soldier, if we believe the pictorial record, being carried off on the shoulders of slaves. Being *sublimis*, Pyrgopolinices is literally between the earth and the sky not as a *semidivus*, but as a common fraud: his 'ontological' claim goes absurdly wrong. The process of bringing Pyrgopolinices down to earth begins by conducting a mock imitation of his 'elation': he is brought low by being elevated high. Proxemics, kinesics, costume, prop and mask: all are in synch in the *Miles*, making a point about a theatrical character given a throne only for the audience to be given the pleasure of seeing him deposed from .it.

⁷⁸ For the possibility that Pyrgopolinices' reference reflects the growing popularity of the Aeneas legend in Rome, cf. Hanson (1959: 52, n. 9).

Here, as everywhere, one cannot overstate the importance of intertextuality, the web of other texts (and performances) that the spectators carry with them into the theatre – especially since a character who ‘makes claims’, such as the soldier, is nothing if not densely textualised. The soldier trades in words to such a degree that his mere existence is practically deferred to the sphere of storytelling. A *miles* is all about a corpus of narratives in need of deconstruction and debunking. Often, we saw, these explicitly extravagant, clearly fictitious stories are told either by the soldier himself or by characters in his entourage, primarily the *cacula*: this is a ploy rendering the textuality of the character transparent and self-conscious. A mechanism of anticlimax, then, is set in motion on the level of dramatic discourse, too, to produce, intertextually, the same effect of deflation that physiognomics produces semiotically. The combination of the two speaks to the density and the multiple layers of the New Comedy performance text, a fundamental tenet of this book.

The soldier transfers onto himself a trajectory of ‘high’ narratives in a conscious act of appropriation; cf. Ter. *Eun.* 399–401 (Gnatho to Thraso):

labore alieno magno partam gloriam
verbis saepe in se transmovet qui habet salem;
quod in test.

A man who has his wits about him knows how to use words to appropriate the glory that other people have won with great labour. This is an ability you possess.

On the level of discourse, the soldier’s claim is debunked by the constant relegation of the narrative level from ‘high’ to ‘low’,⁷⁹ which, once more, produces the effect of an inharmonious displacement. Often, the form of intertextual play with the soldier is what intertextual theory terms ‘system reference’:⁸⁰ that is, a ‘set of narrative variants’, where reference to a particular version cannot suppress others; on the contrary, it evokes them.⁸¹

⁷⁹ For the high/low axis in the ‘ideology of Hellenistic performance’, see Hunter (2002).

⁸⁰ Compare the discussion on Demeas and Menander’s *Samia* in Chapter 1.

⁸¹ Edmunds (2001: 147).

The 'mythological exemplum' is one illustration of system reference. In the case of the soldier, the point of the mythological exemplum is exactly the bathos caused by the distance, or the 'delay', between the version of choice in the text and the variants in the paradigm.

This is the sort of mythological demotion at play, for instance, in Terence's *Eunuchus*. Thraso, compelled to concede a shameful defeat, still attempts to uphold himself as Hercules; his reference, though, to Hercules' *servitium amoris* to Omphale (*Eun.* 1025–8), far from restoring his dignity, only serves to remind spectators of the heroic aspects of Herculean myth that Thraso has inevitably relinquished (in fact, to which he was never entitled). Another comical form of system reference is when a particular variant proposes and annuls itself at the same time: such annulment ensues, to reuse a previous example, in Plautus' *Miles*, when Artotrogus equates Pyrgopolinices not to Achilles, but to the non-existent 'brother of Achilles' (*Plaut. Mil. Gl.* 58–65).

However, in my view, the most interesting variation of system reference in relation to the soldier is when the mythological exemplum invokes not only the narrative content of a particular variant, but also, more importantly, the literary ethos and cultural status of the narrative that constitutes it.⁸² Mythological variants travel through a cultured hierarchy of literary (and other) genres, invoking each time the character as well as the prestige of the text that verbalises them. Debunking the soldier often involves displacing the mythological exempla he invokes from a 'high' to a 'low' genre. The most sustained play with such intertextual shifts is found again in the *Miles Gloriosus*. Specifically, Pyrgopolinices claims a niche in the 'high' of heroic epic, only to be forced down to the 'low' of 'romantic' tragedy, the mime and epic parody.

When Pyrgopolinices is reported to boast that his irresistible masculinity surpasses even that of Paris himself (*isque Alexandri praestare praedicat formae suam, Mil. Gl.* 787), a web of stories

⁸² It is debated whether a myth is 'a structure of thought' or 'a type of story with characteristic modes and conventions', cf. Buxton (1994: 16). The dilemma may be academic. Myths are passed on through various forms of narrative; and, *qua* narrative, the 'meaning' of myths is contingent upon the strategies of the narrator and the context of his performance.

related to Ilium – and inevitably to the *Iliad* – is called in. The soldier asserts for himself pride of place in the literary ethos of heroic epic. The opening scene had already been pivotal in articulating the soldier's purported entitlement to epic might. His military armour takes on a life of its own in this scene, an Iliadic life. His shield, we saw, can dazzle foes to death, like the shield of Agamemnon, which bears the Gorgon head (*Il.* 11.36). His self-willed sword with the exasperated eagerness to slay is a motif repeated many times in the *Iliad* and beyond (*Il.* 4.126, 5.661, etc.).⁸³ The long, wavy hair of the mask is again directly reminiscent of a conspicuous trait of epic warriors (remember the κάρη κομόωντος Ἀχαιοῦς in *Il.* 2.11, 28, 51, etc.).⁸⁴ Eleanor Leach may be exaggerating when she argues that Pyrgopolinices actually creates an 'ominous atmosphere' by this 'initial show of belligerence',⁸⁵ but the fact is that, even if this is all a farce, the soldier does demand in earnest a share in the narrative of heroic feats. When the soldier wants to be taken seriously, he naturally appeals to the *Iliad*.⁸⁶

Actually, the soldier in the play is himself an *Ilium* that has to be conquered (*Mil. Gl.* 1025). To this end, conquering this 'Ilium', the slave Palaestrio weaves a whole nexus of military imagery,⁸⁷ which projects the comic task of taking Pyrgopolinices down to the archetype of Paris' outrage against Menelaus, with Pyrgopolinices, the self-illuded beau, being of course the former. Menelaus–Pleusicles sails out (*pleusis*) to reclaim glory (*kleos*) and his woman from her abductor, who by his own bombastic

⁸³ Cf. Schaaf (1977: 402, n. 118), for more examples.

⁸⁴ On the Gorgon's head, the warrior's hair and generally the 'gaze of death', see Vernant (1985).

⁸⁵ Leach (1979: 195).

⁸⁶ Various historical warriors have been suggested as subtexts of Pyrgopolinices, among them Demetrios Poliorketes (Grimal 1968) or, less convincingly, Hannibal (Leach 1979: 205ff.). An obvious, but unnoticed, possibility, which certainly would not have been above Plautus even if absent from his original, was the anticlimactic connection between Alexander of Macedon and Pyrgopolinices, the 'Alexander of Troy'. But whatever the Greek or Punic associations of Pyrgopolinices, and regardless of the fact that in terms of theatrical *skēuē* his outlook is Greek, his figure is essentially Romanised, cf. Hanson (1965); Cagniard (1999).

⁸⁷ Cf. Forehand (1973). On the broadest issue of the use of military metaphor by the intriguing slave, see Fraenkel (2007: 231–8).

choice is seen as the blueprint of all adulterers ('I believe he is such a great seducer of women like no other before or after', *ita magnus moechus mulierum ... ut neminem | fuisse nec futurum credo*, *Mil. Gl.* 775–6). Somewhere in the picture there is also a clever slave, Palaestrio: when elsewhere in Plautus the Troy archetype was invoked, the slave took up the role of the wily Ulysses.⁸⁸ Although the mythological connection is not made explicitly in this play, this is the slave's role here, too. By designing the intrigue of the play, Palaestrio sees to it that Pyrgopolinices is declined the 'glory' of being overcome after any Iliadic episode.⁸⁹

Pyrgopolinices will not be given even the consolation of a Menelaus–Paris type of duel, as per *Iliad* 3, less-than-dignified though its outcome had been for Alexander of Troy. He has to be stripped not only of his girl, but also of his *Iliad* completely: this can be achieved only if the performance plummets from the heights of the *Iliad*, where Pyrgopolinices wants it, to a self-consciously 'lower' register, the decidedly unheroic, so-called 'romantic' version of Euripides' *Helen*.⁹⁰ This play's 'Menelaus' will not evoke his Iliadic pursuits, and this play's 'Helen' (Philo-comasium) is not the great adulteress, but a wretched, innocent girl. Pleusicles' triumph will be modelled on a story in which Menelaus disguised as a shipman steals his girl from an ignominious captor. The *Helen* model, though, negates the *Iliad*. It is a story about a war in vain. The soldier's is a story about vanity personified.

The intertextual displacement does not conclude here, however. The *magnus moechus*, who is the son of Venus and invokes Mars as his god-protector (*Mil. Gl.* 1414), will not be spared the indignity of having his story lowered even further. All the components of Pyrgopolinices' story come from another, totally anticlimactic, genre much further down the generic pecking order (but itself

⁸⁸ Chrysalus' *canticum* in *Bacch.* 925–75 is the *locus classicus*; cf. also *Pseud.* 1244, with Fraenkel (2007: 10ff.); Jocelyn (1969); Jensen (1997).

⁸⁹ On the metatheatricality of Palaestrio's ruse, cf. Dumont (1993); Frangoulidis (1994b).

⁹⁰ That the second part of the *Miles* is modelled on a *Helen*-type of narrative was noted long ago; see primarily Leo (1912: 166); Jachmann (1931: 193ff.); Gaiser (1967). However, Plautus' game of paradigm shifts has not been noticed.

prefigured in epic, namely, in *Odyssey* 8.266ff.): a supposedly stupid 'husband', a wily 'wife', an abetting female servant (*ancilla conciliatrix*, *Mil. Gl.* 1410) and, above all, a lusty *moechus*, who at the end gets his just deserts, furnish the core scenario of none other than the adultery mime, after which Pyrgopolinices' fate is judged at the end of the *Miles Gloriosus*.⁹¹ This is an absolute nadir, and a perfectly suitable outcome, for the soldier. Acting out a typical adultery mime scenario, Pyrgopolinices is nearly castrated, but before that he is first pimped and prostituted by Palaestrio like the common whore that stands in front of him (*Mil. Gl.* 1054–63). Of course, being the rare catch that he is Pyrgopolinices goes for an extravagant price (he is not a common whore to be offered to the vulgar crowd, *Mil. Gl.* 1057), which Milphidippa stills finds cheap:

- [Palaestrio] age, mi Achilles, fiat quod te oro, serva illam pulchram pulchre,
exprobre benignum ex te ingenium, urbi cape, occisor regum.
1055
- Pyrg. Eu hercle odiosas res. quotiens hoc tibi, verbero, ego interdixi,
meam ne sic volgo pollicitere operam? Pal. Audin tu, mulier?
dixi hoc tibi dudum, et nunc dico: nisi huic verri adfertur merces,
non hic suo seminio quemquam porclenam impertiturst.
Milph. Dabitur quantum ipsus preti poscet. Pal. Talentum
Philippi huic opus auri est; 1060
minus ab nemine accipiet. Milph. Eu ecastor nimis vilest tandem.
- Pyrg. Non mihi avaritia umquam innatast: satis habeo divitiarum,
- [Palaestrio] Come on, my Achilles, do as I ask, save that beautiful girl in a
beautiful manner, show your benevolent spirit, you sacker of
cities, you slayer of kings.
- (Pyrg.) By Hercules, nasty business, this is. How many times have
I forbidden you, you rascal, to promise my services to the
vulgar crowd like this?
- (Pal) Can you hear me, woman? I have told you that before and I am
telling you again now: unless you give something in exchange
to this boar, he will not give his seed to any sow.

⁹¹ Though unequivocal references to the adultery mime come mostly from late Republican and Imperial sources (Horace, *Sat.* 2.7.58ff.; Ovid, *Tr.* 2.1.497–506; Juvenal, 6.41–44; Apuleius, *Met.* 9), the building blocks of the genre were there, albeit piecemeal, from at least as early as Old Comedy and maybe even before; cf. Ar. *Thesm.* 331ff., and the fragmentary hypothesis of Cratinus' *Dionysalexandros* (POxy 663, *PCG* IV, 140ff.) – significantly, with Paris as the cheated husband. On the adultery mime, see Reynolds (1946); Wiemken (1972); Kehoe (1984); McKeown (1979: 71–6); Petrides (2003).

Conclusion: heroes and mice

- (Milph.) Let him be paid whatever price he asks!
(Pal.) He needs a talent's worth of Philippic gold. He won't take less
from anyone.
(Milph.) By Castor, he is very cheap, indeed!
(Pyrg.) It is not in my nature to be avaricious: I have enough riches.

It is as a reminder of the colossal paradigm shift unfolding in front of the audience that Palaestrio sneeringly grants Pyrgopolinices what Artotrogus had denied him in the opening scene: the right to be identified with Achilles.

Conclusion: heroes and mice

And what then is the role played by the *kolax* particularly in this dethronement of the soldier from the pedestal of 'high' epic? The *kolax* achieves an epic-related paradigm shift all of his own and right from the start: it lands the soldier abruptly from the high podium of epic on the lowly stool of epic parody. The sponger's name, Artotrogus ('Bread-Nibbler'), carries associations of a special kind of parasitic *edacitas* that similar names, such as Gnatho (*Gnathōn*, the 'Jaw'), Miccotrogus (*'Psichotrōx'*, from *mic(c)a*, 'breadcrumb') or the imaginative formations in Alciphron's 'parasite letters' (*Artepithymos*, 3.3; *Artopyktēs*, 3.14; *Psichoklastēs*, 3.7; *Psichiōn*, 3.10; *Leichopinax*, 3.8; *Trapezoleiktēs*, 3.10, etc.), also suggest.⁹² This voracious appetite of the parasite for even the smallest quantity and the meanest quality of food, which he acquires by thieving and crafty deception, is given various animal *anaphorai* in comedy, such as 'weevil' (*curculio*) or 'worm' (Anaxilas, fr.32 K.-A.). The most memorable metaphor, however, occurs twice in Plautus, repeated almost *verbatim*. The first is Saturio's 'parasitic genealogy' in *Persa*, 55–9:

nam numquam quisquam meorum maiorum fuit,
quin parasitando paverint ventres suos:
pater, avos, proavos, abavos, atavos, tritavos
quasi mures semper edere alienum cibum,
neque edacitate eos quisquam poterat vincere;

⁹² Bucco of the Atellana, possibly from *bucca*, great jaw, may also point to this, cf. Lapini (1992: 54–5).

For there was hardly any of my ancestors who did not fill his belly by exercising the art of the parasite: my father, my grandfather, my great-grandfather, my great-great-grandfather, my great-great-great-grandfather, my great-great-great-great-grandfather, all of them like mice ate away the food of other people, and there was never anyone who could beat them in voracity”.

The second is Ergasilus’ wry remark in *Capt.* 76–9:

quasi mures semper edimus alienum cibum;
ubi res prolatae sunt, quom rus homines eunt,
simul prolatae res sunt nostris dentibus.

Like mice we always eat other people’s food. When there is a vacation, when people go out to the country, then there is a vacation also for our teeth.

Intertextual theory uses the rhetorical term ‘syllepsis’ to describe the phenomenon of semantic distance, and sometimes clash, between the contextual and the intertextual determination of a word.⁹³ Contextually, as evident from the examples above, the association of parasites with vermin falls into the conventional pattern of humorous parasitic swagger (the parasite takes pride in what would normally be demeaning). In the interplay, however, between a military parasite, who bears associations with vermin, and a soldier, who claims a share in ‘high’ epic, Artotrogus automatically brings to bear on Pyrgopolinices’ *Iliad* a tradition of epic parodies where the stars are humble animals, such as the *War of the Frogs and the Mice* (*Batrachomyomachia*) or the *War of the Mice and the Weasel*.⁹⁴

This association of parasites with epic parody seems to have been clear in Alciphron’s mind at least, since the parasitic name *Leichopinax* is the name of a mouse warrior in the *Batrachomyomachia* (*Batr.* 100) and the rest of his nomenclature is closely connected – one is tempted to say, stylised – after such mouse-heroes as *Psicharpax* (*Batr.* 24), *Trōxartēs* (*Batr.* 28), *Pternotrōktēs* (*Batr.* 29), *Meridarpax* (*Batr.* 260), *Knaisōn* (*Batr.* 261).⁹⁵ Plautine invention or not,⁹⁶

⁹³ Cf. Rifaterre (1979), (1980), (1981). For the classical world, see Edmunds (2001: 150–3).

⁹⁴ Schibli (1983).

⁹⁵ Saturio’s genealogy may be compared with that of king Psicharpax in *Batr.* 24–55.

⁹⁶ The opening scene of the *Miles* is normally regarded to be following the Greek original faithfully, despite the odd Plautine touch ‘auf Nebensächliches’ (Schaaf 1977: 129). The most comprehensive discussion is Schaaf (1977: 124–49). Scholars agree that ‘Artotrogus’ is Plautus’ ‘lively creation in Greek’, cf. W. Hoffmann (1961: 31). Hoffmann, however, does not preclude that Plautus retained the name from the original, ‘bewusst und in voller Kenntnis ihrer Bedeutung’.

Artotrogus' name is conducive to intertextual over-determination, at least to the spectator who had enough Greek at his fingertips to penetrate its etymology.⁹⁷ Once more, of course, the intertextuality plays not so much with specific texts as with the divergent ethos of two genres.⁹⁸ The anticlimactic nomenclature of the *Miles*, a pre-emptive cancellation of the soldier's claim to 'high' epic, as early in the action as it ensues, is the strongest intertextual gesture of the play and the clearest evidence of the deconstructing effect the semiotic system '*kolax*' has on the semiotic system '*stratiōtēs alazōn*'. At the side of his mouse-like lieutenant, the soldier, a monstrous tyrant according to the *Helen* paradigm, opts for the *Iliad*, but instead he finds a place in a *Batrachomyomachia*.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ We cannot locate easily the *Batrachomyomachia* or any other epic parody in the 'intertextual encyclopaedia' of a Roman audience in Plautus' times; we do have pictorial evidence, however, dating from about the 150s, barely a generation after Plautus' death (the conventional date is 184), suggesting Roman familiarity with the Egyptian tradition of animal epic; cf. Cèbe (1966: 345–54). Egypt is regularly suggested as the birthplace of the Greek animal epic, although this should remain a conjecture. On the Egyptian tradition and its relation specifically with the *Batrachomyomachia*, see Wölke (1978: 250–7); Schibli (1983: 7–13). If we believe Phaedrus, 4.6.1–2, pictorial representations of the weasel and mouse war acquired widespread currency at least in the first century AD: *Cum victi mures mustelarum exercitu | historia quorum et (quot sunt Scheinz-Hosius) in tabernis pingitur* . . .

⁹⁸ The date of these particular mock epics is debated. The most plausible hypothesis is that they are early Hellenistic: see Wölke (1978: 46–70), with bibliography. Mock epics are ascribed to Homer by the pseudo-Herodotean *Vita*, 24, which itself may be of Hellenistic origin; cf. Forderer (1960: 8).

⁹⁹ A similar generic transposition is effected in *Odyssey*, 9. 513–16: Polyphemus knew of his doom, but expected that the son of a god like himself would be brought down by the Iliadic ideal of an opponent who is *megas kai kalos*. Instead, he got Outis, the *Odyssey* personified!

A FEW GOOD MEN: THE *PANCHRĒSTOS* MASK AND THE POLITICS OF PERFECTION

This concluding chapter is a case study that brings together some of the most fundamental claims of this book. First and foremost, that in response to parallel developments in the wider cultural milieu of the fourth century BC, *opsis* in New Comedy is densely semiotised and potentially allusive, capable of calling in various systems of reference (literary, theatrical, cultural and ideological) even on the micro-level of a physiognomised ‘face’ – a phenomenon that I have termed ‘intervisuality’. The semiotised components of *opsis*, primarily the mask, make the texture of Menander’s plays more dense by providing necessary depth, perspective, and even ideological tension, to a cleverly varied, but inescapably formulaic, kind of plot and to a lively drawn but circumscribed stripe of character. New Comedy plays need to be read bearing in mind this potent collaboration between *logos* and *opsis*, which implicates the traditions of the theatrical stage (both the comic and the tragic) as well as the discourses of the democratic polis. In other words, hermeneutically speaking, it is *sine qua non* to acknowledge the mask’s (and generally, the visual element’s) allusive semiosis in New Comedy performance, for all the uncertainties involved in the process, if one is to gauge the multi-layered, subtle richness of New Comedy as a genre and begin to understand the full theatrical experience of Menander’s spectators. This chapter will try to exemplify what we stand to gain through the combined study of one mask, the paradoxical *panchrēstos neaniskos*, and three characters: Charisios (*Epitrepontes*), Pamphilus (Terence’s *Hecyra*) and Pamphilus (Terence’s *Andria*).

The weight of perfection

In both the tragic and the comic catalogues of Pollux, the *panchrēstos neaniskos* (Comic Mask No. 10, Tragic Mask No. 7)

holds a special position, placed at the top of the list. Pollux lists the features of the mask as follows (4.146):

ὁ μὲν πάγχρηστος ὑπέρυθρος, γυμναστικός, ὑποκεχρωσμένος, ῥυτίδας ὀλίγας ἔχων ἐπὶ τοῦ μετώπου καὶ στεφάνην τριχῶν, ἀνατεταμένους τὰς ὀφρῦς.

The excellent youth is ruddy and athletic, with high complexion, a few wrinkles on his forehead, a ridge of hair, and raised eyebrows.

Bernabò Brea (1981: 157) describes the Lipari specimens that he identifies with the *panchrēstos* in the following fashion:

[The *panchrēstos* features] an oval face, rather longish and sharp, a forehead in most cases rather rounded, which always presents a few horizontal wrinkles, goggle eyes with round, protruding eyeballs, in which the iris is always indicated by a small bowl-shaped hollow, and the eyelids are well outlined, especially the upper one. The hair is represented by a unitary mass, without a parting on the forehead, from where it even protrudes slightly. The hair is generally finely streaked, and only in some variants of the type is it rendered rather more plastically with small parallel locks. (my translation)

Although, as often repeated in this book, Pollux's classificatory criteria are neither entirely clear nor consistent, the priority of the *panchrēstos* in Pollux's two catalogues must reflect the fact that he is the oldest among comic and tragic youths, as the wrinkles on his forehead apparently demonstrate.¹ Similarly, the first *pappos* (Pollux Comic Mask No. 1) is the oldest among the old men, and the *pappos* (Pollux Comic Mask No. 21) the oldest among the slaves. In other words, that the *panchrēstos* is given pride of place among the youths in Pollux's catalogue need not be linked with the observation that it ranks among the comic masks that appear 'con maggior frequenza'² in the archaeological record. To judge again from the Lipari specimens quoted above, this popularity of the *panchrēstos* as a votive or an ornamental piece of art may be due to the physical beauty of the mask more than to any other possible factor; in other words, it need not suggest that the

¹ The first four youth masks at least in Pollux's comic catalogue (Pollux Comic Masks, Nos 10–13) seem to be listed in descending order of age. The *panchrēstos* has 'a few wrinkles'; the *melas* looks νεώτερος ('younger' or 'rather young'), sc. compared with the *panchrēstos*; the *oulos* is μᾶλλον νέος ('younger', apparently than the *melas*) and has just one wrinkle; and the *hapalos* is the youngest of them all.

² Bernabò Brea (1981: 157).

panchrēstos was also the *prosōpon* most commonly chosen for the youth in New Comedy performance. The frequency of the mask in the archaeological record also need not mean that the *panchrēstos* was a ‘generico’, a kind of non-specific mask fit for any dramatic purpose (Bernabò Brea 1981: 144), and thus readily available for ‘ceux rôles que l’auteur n’avait pas marqués de traits trop individuels’ (Navarre 1914: 13).

The latter theory was predicated on the mask’s ‘trade name’, giving the term *panchrēstos* not a moral interpretation (‘excellent’ or ‘all-virtuous’), but a practical one (‘all-useful’, ‘good for all intents and purposes’). This sense does come across occasionally in Greek sources (cf. *LSJ* s.v.),³ but it is not compulsory in this situation, since: (a) the weight of *chrēstos* as a moral attribute is too strong to ignore; (b) the moral usages (‘good’, ‘honest’, ‘worthy’, and the intermediate senses ‘beneficial’, ‘pleasant’, etc.) seem to outweigh the practical ones in our sources; and (c) the first compound *pan-* is most often used to intensify adjectives describing conditions of the soul (cf. *pamphilos*, *pagkakistos*, *panagathos*, etc.). Anyhow, in many a case, and most memorably in Xenophon, *Mem.* 2.4.5, where one’s *philoi* are called *panchrēston ktēma*, the practical and the moral senses intersect and well nigh merge.⁴ The term *panchrēstos* as a ‘trade name’ for this mask must have pointed to an ‘excellent’ youth in every sort of way.

More importantly, the very features of the *panchrēstos* militate against the possibility that it could have been of generic use. It seems much more likely that the mask was intended not for the average youth, but for a special representative of the genus. The *oligai rhytides* on his forehead make the *panchrēstos* appear pensive, energetic and vigorous,⁵ but they also signal a dawning ripeness, which is not a common but a particular trait among the

³ Navarre (1914: 12–13), compares compounds such as *achrēstos* (useless) and *polychrēstos* (multi-useful).

⁴ Xen. *Mem.* 2.4.5, attempts a suggestive wordplay between *chrēsimos*, useful, and *chrēstos*, which is used as a synonym of *agathos*, so that in the end *panchrēston ktēma* ends up meaning both ‘most serviceable’ and ‘most good’.

⁵ In physiognomic theory it is a sign of bravery to have a forehead that is ‘neither smooth nor entirely full of wrinkles’ (οὔτε λείον οὔτε παντάπασι ῥυτίδωδες, [Arist.] *Phgn.* 807b4).

characters of this group. The wrinkles give the *panchrēstos* a *gravitas* not to be found on other *prosōpa* of the genus Youth. Age-wise at least (but in the case of the free men of New Comedy, especially the youths, age is usually a correlative of status) the *panchrēstos* seems to straddle the boundaries between fathers and sons; to mediate, that is, between the fully-fledged (but slightly over-ripe) citizens at the head of the household (husbands, fathers and eventually grandfathers) and the much younger representatives of the free Athenian male, some of whom, like the *hapalos*, are only sixteen years old and whose adventures in the play represent a journey towards (civic) maturation. This sense of liminality in age, and arguably in status, is not unconnected with the *panchrēstos*' physical charm, as is evident on the Lipari finds. It seems reasonable to suppose that the *panchrēstos*, as the oldest among a group of men who strive to become fully-fledged citizens, was meant to represent the pinnacle of youthful beauty and manliness on the verge of civic adulthood; otherwise put, the mask's beauty, as it so happens in Greek art at large, may not be premised exclusively on aesthetics, but may carry particular symbolic baggage.

Be that as it may, by virtue of his advanced age, the civic status that usually comes with it (an older young man is no longer *skiatrophias*, for example, but can be trusted to venture out in the polis with more or less freedom of movement and action and more or less civic responsibility), and above all because of his distinct physiognomy, which will be unpacked immediately below, the *panchrēstos* represents something of a paradox in the New Comedy system of youth masks. New Comedy youths as a rule are childish and imperfect individuals along the path of civic accomplishment, which they conquer only at the end of the play, an achievement sealed by the ritual of *eggyē*. This marks the transition of the youth from his former carefree status of shielded dependency to the responsible self-determination of a *paterfamilias*. Contrary to this norm, however, the physiognomy of the *panchrēstos* does not connote immaturity, but the opposite: it exudes an aura of achievement and indeed (civic) excellence; in fact it represents a Mean and an *entelecheia*, which seems to fly in the face of the common initiatory scenario that circumscribes the usual roles of Menander's young men (Figure 5.1).



Figure 5.1 Specimen of the *panchrestos* mask from Lipari (inv. 6766)

Gazing at the mask physiognomically, one locates on it all the insignia of perfection in a very concrete sense: as an ethical type, the *panchrēstos* seems to occupy that famous ‘ideal medial position’⁶ propounded by physiognomists as the psychophysical

⁶ Sassi (1988: 57–8).

standard for the freeborn Greek male. According to the common physiognomic principle of empathy between body and soul, however, the *panchrēstos*' physical perfection should intimate also an analogous state of mental accomplishment, a maturity of the deliberative faculties of the soul (*to bouleutikon*),⁷ which, paradoxically, in the Aristotelian thinking that underpins the physiognomic concepts, is associated not with immature youths, but with adult (*sc.* in New Comedy, married) men. If one bears in mind also that mental accomplishment in a genre like Menander's can only suggest civic maturation, as well as complete and unswerving involvement in the mechanisms of the polis, it transpires immediately how uneasily the *panchrēstos* sits within the genus of Young Men.

Most youth masks, as analysed in Chapter 3, bear the signs of an immature *ēthos in statu formandi* and/or other insignia of moral imperfection (dark or white complexions signifying cowardice or femininity, wavy hair indicating excessive spiritedness, curly locks showing a tendency towards dastardly cunning, etc.). Not the *panchrēstos*, however. For one, both terms used to describe the complexion of the mask, *hyperythros* (reddish enough to appear healthy and strong) and *hypokechrōsmenos* (with a complexion slightly darkened by exposure to the sun), point to an ideal combination, of a moderate *krasis* on the one hand, and of a way of life on the other, which involves going outdoors without being boorish or servile – that is, of a felicitous *physis* and a beneficial *hexis*. The semantics of *mēden agan* suggested by the preposition *hypo* here is cardinal. *Hyperythros* or *leukerythros* as a physiognomic term describes a composition ([Arist.] *Phys.* 806b4–5)⁸ that ensures health and wellbeing (*euphyia*), alertness of mind

⁷ Cf. Arist. *Pol.* 1260a9–14: 'In a different manner every time, the freeborn rules over the slave, the male over the female, and the man over the child. All parts of the soul are inherent in each one of the above, but in a different way every time. The slave lacks the deliberative faculty altogether, the female possesses this ability, but devoid of authority, and the child can deliberate, but in a rudimentary fashion' (ἄλλον γὰρ τρόπον τὸ ἐλεύθερον τοῦ δούλου ἄρχει καὶ τὸ ἄρρεν τοῦ θήλεος καὶ ἄνθρωπος παιδός, καὶ πᾶσιν ἐνυπάρχει μὲν τὰ μόρια τῆς ψυχῆς, ἀλλ' ἐνυπάρχει διαφερόντως. ὁ μὲν γὰρ δούλος ὅλως οὐκ ἔχει τὸ βουλευτικόν, τὸ δὲ θῆλυ ἔχει μὲν, ἀλλ' ἄκυρον, ὁ δὲ παῖς ἔχει μὲν, ἀλλ' ἀτελές).

⁸ Ὑπερυθρός also presents a slight whiteness: see, e.g., Thuc. 2.49.5, where *hyperythron* is 'setzt in Beziehung' with *chlōron* and *pelitnon*, cf. Dürbeck (1977: 112).

(*eumathia*) and agility of body (*oxykinēsia*).⁹ At stake here, of course, is the common Greek ideal of ‘a healthy mind in a healthy body’ (νοῦς ὑγιής ἐν σώματι ὑγιεῖ),¹⁰ which corresponds also to the *panchrēstos*’ gymnastic pursuits (*gymnastikos*). His athletic interests provide the *panchrēstos* with ‘la haule causé par le soleil et le grand air’,¹¹ and accord well with the spirited and courageous, but also rather haughty, nature suggested by his raised eyebrows.¹² This *hypsēlophrosynē* is the only blemish in the image of *panchrēstos*’ perfection; but even this is an ambiguous trait (arrogance, self-importance and self-assurance, but also high-spiritedness and high-mindedness).¹³

More essentially striking, though, is the way the *panchrēstos* intimates the proper measure (τὸ ἄριστον μέτρον), contrary to all expectations regarding the mask of a New Comedy youth. All in all, the *panchrēstos*’ moderate complexion achieves the mean between the *leukos* of femininity and the *agan melas* of cowardly barbarians:¹⁴ this is, indeed, the ‘intermediate colour, which is conducive to manliness’ (μέσον χρῶμα τὸ πρὸς ἀνδρείαν συντελοῦν, [Arist.] *Phgn.* 812a14–15).¹⁵ The fourth-century tragedian Chaeremon (fr. 1 Sn.-K.) suggests a connection, not without paretymological wordplay, between ‘slight redness’ (ἡπιώτατον ἐρυθρῆμα) and *rhythmos* (ἐπερρυθμιζεν), a sense of symmetry and harmony that ensures beauty of both body and soul. The subject of *eperrhythmizen* here, crucially, is *aidōs*, that personified and

⁹ Cf. [Arist.] *Phgn.* 806b5–6: ‘Complexions of a pinkish hue bespeak a fair disposition’ (αἱ δὲ λευκέρυθροι [χροιαὶ] εὐφυῖαν). Cf. also: Adam. 2. 33: ‘people with slightly red complexions are of a good dispositions, quick at learning and agile in their movements’ (τὸ δὲ πρᾶως ἐρυθρὸν εὐφυές, εὐμαθές, ὀξυκίνητον); Ps.-Polemon, 6: ‘a slight redness in complexion shows a man of good disposition, agile and quick at learning’ (τὸ πρᾶως ἐρυθρὸν εὐφυῆ καὶ ὀξυκίνητον καὶ εὐμαθῆ ἄνδρα κατηγορεῖ).

¹⁰ Cf., e.g., Pl. *Grg.* 479b7–8; [Arist.] *Pr.* 951a7–8. ¹¹ Navarre (1914: 13).

¹² Cf. Pollux, 2.49. Also Anon. *Med. Phgn.* 2: ‘raised eyebrows are a sign of haughtiness’ (ὄφρῦες μετάρσιοι σημεῖον ὑψηλοφροσύνης).

¹³ See Pl. *Resp.* 550b1–7, where *hypsēlophrōn* is paired with *philotimos* and *philonikos* as a kind of intermediate condition between relying on calculation (*to logistikon*), on the one hand, and on desire (*to epithymēton*) and hot passion (*to thymoeides*), on the other.

¹⁴ [Arist.] *Phgn.* 812a12–13.

¹⁵ Navarre (1914: 13), cites also Lucian, *Anach.* 25: ‘these people have a slightly red complexion, which the sun has made darker and more manly-looking’ (οὗτοι δὲ ἡμῖν ὑπέρυθροι ἐς τὸ μελάντερον ὑπὸ τοῦ ἡλίου κεχρωσμένοι καὶ ἄρρενωποι).

deified¹⁶ ‘inhibitory emotion’¹⁷ of respect, honour, shame and fear, which suggests an aptitude to self-censorship and self-control.¹⁸

αἰδώς δ’ ἐπερρύθμιζεν ἡπιώτατον
ἐρύθημα λαμπρῶ προστιθεῖσα χρώματι.

A sense of shame imposed on [its?] splendid¹⁹ complexion a slight redness in good measure.

The *panchrēstos* has built into his ‘programme’ the self-correctional facility that goes hand in hand with *sophrōsynē*.²⁰

The mask’s moderately protruding eyes (as seen on the Lipari specimens) also communicate the same kind of *mesē hexis*.²¹ Moreover, an air of restraint and discipline may be intimidated by the mask’s characteristic hairstyle, the ridge of hair (*stephanē trichōn*).²² None of the physiognomical treatises ascribes any particular meaning to this coiffure; yet it appears to have been a conservative and rather composed style. It is perhaps suggestive of such an interpretation that, apart from the *panchrēstos*, the four other masks of New Comedy that display the same hairstyle are, on the one hand, the *hēgemōn presbytēs* (Pollux, Comic Mask No. 3) and the *presbytēs makropōgōn kai episeiōn* (Pollux, Comic

¹⁶ Cf., e.g., Eur. *Ion* 336–7; *Her.* 557. Hesychius, α 1791, reports that at some point in time there was even an altar of the goddess *Aidōs* (Αἰδοῦς βωμός) on the Acropolis.

¹⁷ Barrett (1964: 207), on Eur. *Hipp.* 244. On αἰδώς, the classic study is Cairns (1993). See also Wilamowitz-Moellendorf (1909: 338–9), on Eur. *Her.* 557; von Erffa (1937).

¹⁸ What this fragment talks about is uncertain. Athenaeus, 13.608d, informs us that it is ἐπὶ τὰ ἄνθη, but see Cataudella (1929: 241): ‘non si vince – infatti – facilmente l’impressione che qui si descriva una bellezza muliebre’, in a fashion analogous to the description of Chaireas’ beauty in Chariton, 1.1.6 (ἐπήνθει γὰρ αὐτοῦ τῷ λαμπρῷ τοῦ προσώπου τὸ ἐρύθημα τῆς παλαιστρας, ὥσπερ ἀργύρῳ χρυσός). Nevertheless, the object described in such terms could still be a flower symbolising female beauty.

¹⁹ In the sense “healthy-looking”; cf. *Hipp. Aēr*.24: “these would be healthy and have a radiant look” (οὔτοι ἂν ὑγινοί τε εἴησαν καὶ λαμπροί).

²⁰ Cf. Ter. *Ad.* 643: ‘he blushed; we are saved!’ (*erubuit; salva res est*).

²¹ [Arist.] *Phgn.* 811b25–6: ‘and since a man must have neither protruding nor hollow eyes, the intermediate condition would be the best’ (ἐπεὶ δὲ οὐτε ἐξόφθαλμον οὐτε κοιλόφθαλμον δεῖ εἶναι, ἡ μέση ἕξις ἂν κρατοῖη).

²² Navarre (1914: 7) describes the physical appearance of this hairstyle as follows: ‘C’est un bourrelet de cheveux couronnant le front et qui descend jusqu’au-dessous des oreilles. Pour obtenir ce bourrelet, on étalait d’abord en avant sur le visage toute la partie antérieure de la chevelure; après quoi, la ramenant sur la tête, on avait soin de la faire bouffer au-dessus du front; cette couronne bouffante était ensuite assujettie en arrière par un cordon, des épingles ou des peignes.’

Mask No. 4), that is, two rather stringent fathers;²³ and, on the other hand, the *hapalos neaniskos* (Pollux, Comic Mask No. 13) and the *agroikos* (Pollux, Comic Mask No. 14), two young men living, the first under the heavy constraints of parental (indeed maternal) supervision, and the second in the country, a conservative space par excellence. This moral template of a disciplinarian father, a heavily supervised youth and a representative of the moral uprightness (and stiffness) of the country allows the supposition that the *stephanē trichōn*, in tandem with the *panchrēstos*' other traits, may have been meant to convey a kind of *ēthos* perceived not only as reserved, but also as proper and blameless – but perhaps with a pinch of potential subversion provided by that loaded sense of *hypsēlophrosynē*, which the mask's raised eyebrows suggest. This is the kind of blamelessness that the average youth tramples upon and the average father often embarrasses, the first in his inability to self-regulate properly (especially somebody as young as the *hapalos* or as inexperienced in the ways of the world as the *agroikos*), the second in his obsessions and excessive reliance on *logismos*.²⁴ If this holds, the *panchrēstos* seems to occupy again this characteristically medial position between an imposed and an imposing form of *sōphrosynē* (the two youngsters, on the one hand, the two fathers, on the other), in the same way that he mediates, age-wise, between the groups of *hēlikiai* of free men: between, on the one hand, 'the children who have not yet been registered in a deme because they are underage' (τοὺς παῖδας τοὺς μήπω δι' ἡλικίαν ἐγγεγραμμένους), or who have just entered the fray of adult life, and, on the other, 'the old men that have been released, sc. from the obligation of public service' (τοὺς γέροντας τοὺς ἀφειμένους); between, that is, 'the imperfect' (τοὺς ἀτελεῖς) and 'the declined ones' (τοὺς παρηκμακότας, Arist. *Pol.* 1275a14–17).

²³ The two *stephanē*-bearing fathers, the *hēgemōn presbytēs* and the *presbytēs makropōgōn kai episeiōn*, appear together on the Naples relief (see Bernabò Brea 1981: fig. 225), which depicts a lively scene in which the calmer *makropōgōn* tries to keep the more spirited *hēgemōn* from striking his delinquent son with a staff.

²⁴ Cf. Onesimos' uncharitable, ironic words for Smikrines in *Epir.* 1081–2: 'this zeal shows a man who relies on calculation and intelligence way too strongly' (λογιστικοῦ γὰρ ἀνδρὸς καὶ σφόδρα φρονούντος ἢ σπουδῆς). On old men and *logismos*, see also Chapter 3.

Here we have, then, the case of a mask that bespeaks an individual advanced enough in age to show physical signs of maturity; that displays a balanced disposition with all the physiognomical accoutrements of mental and moral accomplishment and moderation; and yet that belongs to a group of characters that as a rule come to acquire those very traits in the course of the action; they do not possess them *a priori*. The paradox of the *panchrēstos* is that physiognomically speaking it represents the mean in a system that otherwise eschewed the mean, deliberately and emphatically, between fathers and sons.

One wonders, therefore, what would the theatrical weight of such ‘perfection’ be on the stage of New Comedy. The *panchrēstos*, I submit, could introduce considerable potential for irony and a modicum of discomfort into the performance, as the mask attacks the very notion of ‘genus’ – a structural principle that buttressed the mask system²⁵ as one of the chief conduits of its ideological operation.²⁶ To investigate this potential, in the rest of the chapter I shall centre on three characters to whom, if my reading of the mask is correct, the *panchrēstos* could well have been ascribed: Charisios (*Epitrepontes*);²⁷ Pamphilus (Terence, *Andria*, from a Menandrian original); and Pamphilus (Terence, *Hecyra*, from an original by Apollodoros of Karystos).

²⁵ At least one other mask, the *eikonikos*, attacks the boundaries of genus as well. The *eikonikos* belongs to the genus Youth; nonetheless, he, too, displays clear signs of an age mismatch, as he has ‘interspersed grey hairs and he shaves his beard’ (ἐνέσπαρμένως τὰς πολιὰς καὶ ἀποξυρᾶται τὸ γένειον). The hint of a beard is especially relevant here: if the *panchrēstos* with his wrinkles is a youth who impinges upon the traits of a *gerōn*, the *eikonikos* with his greying hair and his showing beard is exactly the opposite. What roles the *eikonikos* played is uncertain – although Webster’s idea (1949: 100) that the mask was used for ‘rich bankers’ and ‘elderly foreigners’ remains much more attractive to me than Mesturini’s ‘simulatore’ (2001: 169–204). The mask’s liminality of genus would play well with its foreignness (*xenos*), a kind of duplication Menander, I believe, would have loved.

²⁶ Wiles (1991: 150–87).

²⁷ Webster (1949: 101), following Robert (1911: 65), ascribes to Charisios the *melas*, translating Pollux’s enigmatic statement that the Dark Youth is πεπαιδευμένω ἢ φιλογυμναστῇ ἑοικώς as ‘cultured *rather than* addicted to physical exercise’ (my emphasis). How this is supposed to apply to Charisios, however, why he should belong to the ‘zweitälteste’ category of youths, or why we should consider him as necessarily younger than Plesidippus (*Rudens*), Philolaches (*Mostellaria*), Phaedria (*Eunuchus*) or Clitipho (*Heautontimorumenos*), to whom Robert cogently ascribes the *panchrēstos* by strength of their age, is not made clear.

The concurrences between these characters and the physiognomical *Sinnbezirk* of the *panchrēstos* as analysed above are, I argue, sufficient to suggest the possibility that they represent transformations of the Excellent Youth on the stage of New Comedy – or at least to legitimise the assumption that their theatrical particularities would be significantly enhanced, and their ironies much deepened, by way of this liminal mask. All the *caveats* expounded in Chapter 2 regarding the attributions of masks to characters continue to apply. It is the principle, once again, that counts the most: that the visual element, now loaded with significant referential capacity, is cardinal in New Comedy performance; and that the ideology and politics of *opsis* are indispensable, if one is to outdo the damaging misperception of shallowness and unidimensionality plaguing the genre of Menander.

Goodfellas

Let us begin with the age of these characters. In keeping with the *panchrēstos*, whose wrinkles are a sign of higher maturity, both Charisios and the two Pamphili appear to be of a rather advanced age for a youth. Among the three, more explicit indications of age are given for the Pamphilus of *Andria*. This Pamphilus *excessit ex ephebis*, that is, he completed his twentieth year some time before the beginning of the action (*And.* 51; compare *Men. Sam.* 15: ἐκ παίδων ἐξελθών). Unlike the case of *Samia*'s Moschion,²⁸ though, the period between Pamphilus' full entry into the society of free adult Athenian men and the day of his arranged marriage to Philumena (*And.* 102) is clearly meant to have been quite significant. Pamphilus' free-grazing years spanned the whole duration of Chrysis' three-year stay in Athens, as a minimum. However, Simo's *interea* (*And.* 70) securely implies that for quite some time before Chrysis' arrival Pamphilus pursued a variety of cultural

²⁸ See Gomme and Sandbach (1973: 546). Martina (1973: 861) suggests that Moschion's *chorēgia*, at least, refers to a deme rather than a polis festival. Lamagna (1998: 185) aptly spots the 'coherence' of Moschion's tone with *Dem.* 18.257 and *Isaeus* 2.42 or 7.35–6 (one can add *Dem.* 21.154), the topos of an aristocrat presenting himself as a model citizen from an early age. The topos certainly mitigates the implications of Moschion's statement.

and, indeed, athletic activities, which required time and effort, such as the training of race horses and hunting dogs or the attendance at philosophical lectures (*And.* 57). How long this period is supposed to have lasted cannot be calculated, but that years rather than months are implied would be a reasonable inference. Some time, possibly a few months, must also have elapsed between Chrysis' funeral and the beginning of the play, as Simo then could spot the grief on Glycerium's face, but did not notice any signs of her pregnancy. Even if one does not press this last point too much²⁹ – after all, Simo had to remain ignorant of his son's forthcoming *nothos* for a while, even at the expense of verisimilitude – we are still looking at a period close to a *quinquennium* between Pamphilus' release from ephebic duty and the present of the action. The Pamphilus of *Andria*, then, must be approaching at least the age of twenty-five, being well into the age of majority and certainly eligible to attend the Assembly, if not yet to hold sortitive or elective office.³⁰

There is no clear evidence concerning the age of Charisios or Pamphilus of *Hecyra*, apart from the fact that the two share with Pamphilus of *Andria* one vital detail: a wide margin of living *liberius* (*And.* 52), a way of life which, apart from considerable leeway for movement and activity, especially as regards erotic affairs (*Hec.* 684: *longum spatium amandi*), also affords, more crucially, control over family property in relative independence from parental authority. Charisios' parents are hardly ever mentioned in the extant part of *Epitrepontes*, and certainly no power other than his own can put a stop to his carousing. Pamphilus of *Hecyra*, too, having succumbed to his father Laches' demands to marry, is virtually given free rein, which includes the liberty to see-saw between courtesan and wife,³¹ at the same time that he is

²⁹ Scafuro (1997) 366–9 probably does.

³⁰ On age requirements in Athenian democracy, see Rhodes (1981: 493–5, 510).

³¹ We have two accounts of Pamphilus' behaviour in the early months of his marriage, one from Parmeno (*Hec.* 157ff.) and another from Bacchis (*Hec.* 750ff.), which are not consistent with one another. That Pamphilus wavered is information garnered from the slave; Bacchis, on the contrary, avows that she kept Pamphilus 'at a distance' (*segregatum*) since he married. As to which version is 'true', in a play about prejudice and the conflict between *nomen* and *mores* (*Hec.* 735), a person's reputation and *ēthos*, the audience are left to their own devices.

responsible for managing important financial business in the interest of the *oikos* (*Hec.* 458–63).

Now, Simo in *Andria* considers this convenience of living *liberius* that he grants his son as an opportunity rather than as an indulgence: the opportunity for Pamphilus to assert himself as a rightful member of the society of men by proving worthy of his father's trust and respect. This is a very important statement. For Simo, the relaxation of parental supervision is practically a *dokimasia*, bound to indicate *ēthos* (*ingenium noscere*, *And.* 53) through the exercise of moral choice in action, that is, through steadfast and virtuous *prohairesis*: in other words, to recall the relevant discussion of *prohairesis* in Chapter 3, it is a rite of passage meant to prove that the sons have attained the most fundamental moral prerogative of an adult, the ability to exercise logical and moral control over their actions.³²

Significantly, to the eyes of their assessors or, in the more loaded case of Charisios, to their own eyes, the youths are supposed to have passed this test of initiation; they have already been proven worthy. This impression of consolidated moral worth generates a *fama* (*Hec.* 99), a reputation of blamelessness, put forth even by otherwise ready detractors, such as Philotis (*Hec.* 152), or by the youths themselves in a moment of great importance, cf. *Epitr.* 908–10:

ἐγώ τις ἀναμάρτητος, εἰς δόξαν βλέπων
καὶ τὸ καλὸν ὃ τι ποτ' ἔστι καὶ ταῖσχροὺν σκοπῶν,
ἀκέραιος, ἀνεπίπληκτος αὐτὸς τῷ βίῳ.

I, the blameless one, who was concerned about my reputation, and always looked to distinguish right from wrong; flawless, beyond reproach in my life.

I shall discuss below the slippages of Charisios' illusory self-assurance, the fiction of his own perfection, and the subversiveness of the Euripidean citation that lies behind it (*Eur. Or.* 922). What I want to stress at the moment is the undeniable force of

³² McGarrity (1978) notes the thematic importance of the freedman Sosia, a *protatikon prosōpon*, for the interplay between *lenitas* and *libertas*, between the relaxation of constriction and the resulting responsibility to behave *liberaliter*. In Sosia's case, such a sequence resulted in manumission; in Pamphilus' case, in the acceptance of duty and responsibility.

such terms as *anamartētos* ('free from moral blame'), with its unmistakable Aristotelian overtones, *akeraios* ('unsullied', 'flawless'), associated in Greek with notions of genuineness, sincerity and purity,³³ and *anepiplēktos* ('beyond reproach'), which sum up a lifetime of (supposedly) impeccable moral conduct, which was meant to safeguard a blameless reputation (εἰς δόξαν βλέπων, *Epitr.* 908).

The attribute of *chrēstotēs* keeps recurring with reference to all three youths – and the temptation to think that Terence's *optimum ingenium* may be translating directly a Greek phrase like πάγχερστον ἦθος is hard to avoid (cf. *And.* 466: Le. *bonum ingenium narras adulescentis*, My. *optimum*; *And.* 487: *ipsest ingenio bono*; *And.* 97: *qui gnatum haberem tali ingenio praeditum*; *Hec.* 152: *pium ac pudicum ingenium narras Pamphili*). The youths are so *chrēstoi* that they give the impression of possessing *omnia humani ingeni | mansuetique animi officia* (*And.* 113–14). Most vitally, they are thought to exercise exemplary continence (*And.* 92: *magnum exemplum continentiae*) and moderation in their moral deliberations (remember that *akrasia*, according to Aristotle, is the trademark of an immature moral subject). Again, it is difficult to believe that Terence's language disguises anything other than the Aristotelian virtues of *mesotēs* and *metriotēs* in these occasions, cf. *And.* 59–61:

SI. studebat et tamen omnia haec mediocriter. [μετρίως?] gaudebam.

SO. Non iniuria; nam id arbitror apprime in vita esse utile, ut nequid nimis [μηδὲν ἄγαν?].

SI. Still he pursued all that with moderation. I was glad. SO. And rightly so; because I think this is the most useful principle to have in life, not to do anything in excess.

Simo's conclusion in his account of Pamphilus' life in *And.* 93–5 is even more suggestive:

nam qui cum ingeniis conflictatur eiusmodi
neque commovetur animus in ea re tamen,
scias posse habere iam ipsum suae vitae modum.

³³ The adjective is often connected with terms such as *orthos*, *ablabēs*, *akribēs* (Pl. *Resp.* 342b6–7), *amemphe*s, *athikton* (Plut. *Mor.* 439b2–7), etc.

A few good men

Because, if a man comes in contact with characters of that kind, but still is not attracted to their ways, you can be certain that this man can now take control over his life.

‘To take control over his life’, of course, follows the spirit rather than the letter of Simo’s words: what Simo is saying is that Pamphilus, achieving a state of *continentia* (*egkrateia*) in the face of temptation, was able to find the true measure (*modum* ~ *metron*) in his life, a condition contingent upon one’s ability to rein in natural impulses (the *innatum*, cf. *Hec.* 543) through the exercise of virtuous choice. Taking control of one’s life is the direct benefit of developing *to prohairesetikon*: what Simo is proclaiming with reference to his son in *And.* 93–5 is the Aristotelian definition of an adult. The ironies behind this situation, and they are many and multifarious, will be analysed further below.

The accomplishment evoked by these words of Simo is socio-political as much as moral. The supposed blamelessness of these young men derives from the belief that they have internalised the code of conduct pertinent to their status, a homosocial set of values, which demands civilised and egalitarian conduct between peers, as well as keeping the appropriate distances from any outsiders to the group (*And.* 62–6). In a nutshell, by others or by themselves these three characters are thought to have adopted fully the system of norms and expectations associated with the notion of the adult male citizen.

Suggestively, the impression of accomplishment projected by these special youths comes complete with a feeling of finality and ‘arrival’. All three are perceived as having irrevocably crossed the threshold of *adulescentia*. This metaphor of crossing a notional boundary features most prominently in *Andria*, 151ff.: Simo imagines Pamphilus to have achieved a *finis* (an ‘end’ as well as a ‘boundary’), the point of crossing out the life of self-indulgence (*meo modo*) and crossing over into a life *alieno more*. Notice the wordplay between *alia* and *alieno*: the life of responsibility is somehow a life of subjection to something that surpasses the Self, namely, the polis. Further down (*And.* 189ff.), the critical passage from the days of whim and desire (*animum ut expleret suum*) into an *alia vita* is envisaged as re-direction, correction of divergence, and return to the ‘right’ path (*redeat in viam*). In most youths this happens only at the end of the play. Both Pamphili, however, are

thought to be there already from the beginning (cf. *Hec.* 541–2). Charisios on his part had internalised a fictional image of himself according to which *vitium* had never existed in his own life: his own path, so he thought, had always been straight.

Naturally, this passage could lead nowhere else than to marriage. This is the crux of the matter. That these three youths are either already married or otherwise engaged in monogamous, committed, marital-like relationships is their defining difference (to recall a famous Aristotelian phrase, their *eidopoios diaphora*),³⁴ an issue of major ideological as well as narratological importance, since it creates a conspicuous permutation of the common New Comedy plot. That this permutation will be fraught with irony is obviously to be expected.

Charisios married Pamphile a few months prior to the beginning of the action; nevertheless, he has never lived with (or touched) his wife, because soon after the marriage he left on a voyage. Pamphilus of *Hecyra* experiences a very similar situation. He, too, got married shortly before the beginning of the play; and he, too, lived with his wife only for a very short while (again without having consummated the marriage) before embarking on family business abroad. David Konstan (1983a: 133) astutely saw the narratological paradox in these two plays: the *Hecyra* and the *Epitrepontes* begin ‘where many other ancient comedies leave off, with a legitimate and acknowledged marriage’; that is, they open well past the moment of *eggyē*, past even the *arotos gnēsion paidōn*, although the characters involved are yet to wake up to the latter fact. Gilbert Norwood (1923: 94) had already famously summed up Terence’s *Hecyra* as ‘a study in married life’. As Konstan again puts it (1983a: 133), the *Hecyra* and the *Epitrepontes* dramatise ‘the pragmatic victory of responsibility over passion’, according to which ‘the warring claims of personal passion and obligation to parent and class, appear long since ended’. The *Hecyra* in particular, as much as it may focus more on the figure of the Mother-in-Law³⁵ and ‘the fiction of

³⁴ Cf. Arist. *Top.* 143b7–10.

³⁵ Goldberg (1986: 149–69).

patriarchy'³⁶ than on the vagaries of the young man's love life,³⁷ seems to be the comedy most involved with 'the morning after'³⁸ compared with any other piece we know.³⁹

Smikrines' attacks against Charisios in the *Epitrepontes* show clearly the great extent to which marriage, the fact that youths like him have irrevocably crossed over into a different mode of life, changes society's outlook on their moral behaviour. *Adulescentia*, says Simo in the *Andria*, is the time to sow one's wild oats with practical impunity. The cleansing onslaught of *odium* for this mode of living, which comes with maturity, ensures redemption. Smikrines fails to discern any such kind of *odium* in the revelling Charisios. But the problem goes even deeper than that: to the eyes of his father-in-law this young man's behaviour is a kind of moral regression. Instead of considering himself the οἰκέτης of the woman whose dowry he is now abusing, Charisios has abandoned his marital chamber (he has become *apokoitos*, *Epitr.* 133–7), and has reverted to a life of *asōtia*: the dolce vita (*hēdys bios*, *Epitr.* 680) of drinking and loving (*pinein* . . . *binein*, *Epitr.* 5–6) and wasting away in a brothel (ἐν ματρυλείῳ, *Epitr.* 694). Smikrines judges Charisios not as a young man to whom a little harmless extravagance can be excused as long as eventually he 'returns to the right path (*redeat in viam*), but as the head of a household, whose aberrant comportment puts the whole *oikos* at risk. In other words, Smikrines is criticising Charisios as a fully-fledged adult.

Unlike Simo, Smikrines cannot overlook Charisios' cavorting with courtesans as childish ἀκρασία, because in the case of Charisios an official marriage and the handing over of a dowry have already taken place. Not only is Charisios himself past the *spatium amandi* anyway, he is also squandering the future of his household and belying the new role he has undertaken in the polis. Smikrines, again unlike Simo, allows no possibility of redemption for

³⁶ Slater (1987–8).

³⁷ Cf. McGarrity (1980–1: 149): 'The major strife in this comedy is not between father and son, although that element is certainly present. Rather, the conflict is between husband and wife.'

³⁸ Cf. Konstan (1983a: 134).

³⁹ See also Duckworth (1952: 149): '[*Hecyra* is] a courageous attempt to portray the development of character and emotional experience after marriage.'

Charisios – and not only because there are no blood ties nor love lost between them. Smikrines is fierce, because such folly as Charisios’ is inexcusable for a *paterfamilias*: there is nothing else for Charisios to do than to return Smikrines’ daughter and dowry; that is to say, to surrender back the insignia of maturity.

Scholars are usually horrified by what they perceive as cynicism and avariciousness in the way Smikrines is trying to annul his daughter’s marriage in Act IV of the *Epitrepontes*. It is true that Smikrines cannot escape easily the burden of his dramatic ancestry, the various *smikrologoi* he is associated with by virtue of theatrical tradition. But we should not disregard the fine touches whereby Menander makes this particular old man a much more rounded and interesting figure than his *Aspis* namesake. We discussed Smikrines’ famous ‘three arguments’ and their cold, but firm logical basis in [Chapter 1](#) of this book. *Epitr.* 689–92, a new piece of text not included in editions before Martina (1997),⁴⁰ provides further, crucial insights into Smikrines’ perspective. That Menander provides him with such depth is a dramaturgical masterstroke. Smikrines’ language in *Epitr.* 689–92 smacks of civic ideology, as he is detailing to Pamphile the consequences of keeping alive a marriage that is terminally ill. To the best of my knowledge this has not been properly emphasised:

(ΣΜ.) οὐδ’ ἂν, μὰ τὴν Δήμητρα, δέκατον ἡμέ[ρας
μέρος καταμε[ίνε]ι ἢ θυγάτηρ ἔνταῦθ’ ἔτι
εἰ μὴ μετοικήσα[σ]ι παραγεγραμμένοις
ἡμῖν κекήδευκ’.

By Demeter, my daughter will not stay even a fraction of a day longer in this house, unless he [Charisios] has married into a family of metics with no civic rights whatsoever!

If Smikrines were to accept Charisios’ behaviour, this would not only be destructive for the financial future and the happiness of his daughter; it would also undermine the status of Smikrines’ own *oikos* in the democratic polis. Specifically, should Pamphile remain

⁴⁰ On the text, see Gronewald (1986), (1999); Pintaudi and López Garcia (1999); Martina (1997: xxviii and apparatus). Καταμε[ίνε]ι’, instead of Martina’s καταμο[νή]ν or Arnott’s καταμέ[νε]ν, is a supplement by Gronewald. For a commentary on the lines, see Martina (2000: 400ff.) and Furley (2009: *ad loc.*).

in union with Charisios under the new circumstances, she would practically transform herself from a citizen wife (*eleuthera gynē*) to a metic; a woman, that is, with whom a citizen enters into concubinage but does not marry. If Smikrines, then, is ‘coming for his dowry and his daughter’, something much more serious than his miserly love of money is at stake. Onesimos’ taunting words, coming at a point in the action where all fears have been allayed, are not the safest guide for understanding the old man’s subjective position and what lies behind it – although the combination of the two perspectives, Onesimos’ and Smikrines’ own, is dramaturgically most opportune.

Onesimos, with the hindsight of Smikrines’ eventual embarrassment and the irresistible opportunity for *Schadenfreude* this affords him, is wont to present the old man as a heartless scrooge. A dowry, however, is not like the pot of gold in Plautus’ *Aulularia* or even the rich spoils in the *Aspis*. It is the measure of a woman’s right to partnership in a civically sanctioned union. A dowry constitutes a valuable resource that belongs to the new *oikos* at large, not to any individual member, being transferred from generation to generation through the exchange of women. Smikrines, for sure, calls it *his* dowry (τὴν προῖκά μου, *Epitr.* 1065), in an ambiguous phrase, which again allows comic allusions to the theatrical tradition of σμικρολογία. But once more, ‘my dowry’ makes sense in civic terms without the need to suppose that Smikrines is just penny-pinching. The dowry is ‘his’, Smikrines’, inasmuch as it represents his own end of a bargain between men – a bargain that Charisios has cancelled by ‘allowing in’ another woman (ἐπεισάξει, *Epitr.* 697), and a prostitute at that. The dowry is also ‘his’ because it is the only means at Smikrines’ disposal to ensure his daughter’s chances to recuperate from this debacle. Should Pamphile linger in a relationship inappropriate for a citizen, she relinquishes her future prospects to remarry (cf. Grone-wald’s interesting supplement to line 824: ἀλλ’ εἰ μὲν ἑτερόν μ’ εἰς γάμον δώσεις, ἐφ’ ᾧ . . .). Smikrines understands marriage not in sentimental, but in civic terms as a transaction between *oikoi* and an issue of status. All superior knowledge aside, there may be something heavy-handed, but there is nothing inherently unreasonable, excessive or extraordinarily heartless in Smikrines’ stance towards Charisios and by extension towards Pamphile,

if he is judging Charisios not as an immature lad, but as a husband who has broken a civic contract. Significantly, Pamphile regards Smikrines' attitude as an exaggeration due to εὐνοία rather than avarice (*Epitr.* 804): as much as this may be a rhetorical ploy,⁴¹ Pamphile still in some way concedes that Smikrines might be on to something, which the slave Onesimos is just not willing to see.

It makes all the difference, then, that these young men are not en route to marriage like most of their peers in New Comedy, but have already conquered that objective one way or another. Even Pamphilus of *Andria*, the sole member of the triad who is not officially married, treats Glycerium 'as well as a wedded wife' (*pro uxore*, *And.* 146, 273). The *Andria*, too, then, in essence, does not really finish with the establishment of a new *oikos*, but that *oikos* is there from the beginning, albeit in a form not sanctioned by law and state. The marriage at the end of the *Andria* is only the shadow of the usual climax; it is rather a legitimisation of a *fait accompli*, which sanctioned itself irregularly but securely by way of *fides*. The *Andria* begins with the preparations for what, according to Simo's ruse, is not 'a real marriage' (*verae nuptiae*, *And.* 47), the union between Pamphilus and Chremes' daughter. Startlingly, as later with the child, Simo has stumbled upon the truth, only he is unable to see it, namely, that the marriage he is preparing cannot but be false, because Pamphilus is already, in a non-legitimate but still in very real way, married. Unlike the other two this highly irregular 'wife business' (*res uxoria*, *And.* 829) between Pamphilus and Glycerium is consummated and complete with an offspring.

The underpinnings of this Pamphilus' relationship with his beloved, whom he calls by her professed Athenian name, Pasi-bula, and not the *nom de guerre* she generally goes by, are *consuetudo*, *amor*, *pudor* and above all *fides*. All these may be common 'ingredients' of New Comic romantic liaisons at large, and may not in themselves put this particular couple miles apart from others (say from Selenium and Alcesimarchus in Plautus' *Cistellaria*, or even Polemon and Glykera in Menander's

⁴¹ See Martina (2000: 807).

Perikeiromene).⁴² There is one fact, however, that does distinguish the *Andria* couple: not only has Pamphilus promised to cling to Glycerium in the teeth of all opposition, he is also willing to recognise (*suscepturum*, *And.* 401) the child he fathered with this foreigner (*peregrina*) against all the imperatives of family and state (*And.* 877–81), despite the fact that he has absolutely no means of proving Glycerium's Athenian provenance. One scene carries considerable symbolic weight in this respect. It is Pamphilus' account of Chrysis' dying testament to himself as something more than Glycerium's lover (*And.* 295–7):

‘... te isti virum do, amicum tutorem patrem;
bona nostra haec tibi permitto et tuae mando fide[i].’
hanc mi in manum dat.

‘I give you to her as a husband, friend, guardian, father. This fortune of ours I assign and I entrust to you.’ And she puts her hand into mine.

The language is loaded, and, although Terence has certainly appropriated the context by laying a distinctly Roman emphasis on *fides*, enough of the Greek model is transparent to allow the following suspicion: as Glycerium's present *tutor* (*kyrios*) hands over the girl *in manum* to her future one, the original Menandrian scene must have been a send-up of the Athenian ritual of *eggyē*. *Pro uxore* is much more scandalously literal than Simo suspects.

The prologue of the *Andria* announces a ploy, but also a theme: that the *Andria* shall be about this self-same notion of *verae nuptiae*; and since it is the union Simo is determined to annul that eventually prevails, namely, the self-arranged *res uxoria* between Pamphilus and Glycerium–Pasibula, the *Andria*, too, can be said to begin where other comedies leave off, with a marital union established on moral principle if not on the authority of the state. Pamphilus is walking on very thin ice indeed, balancing precariously between his avowal to uphold *fides*, which in this case calls for blind faith in Glycerium's own view of her origins,⁴³ and an

⁴² For Demeas in *Samia*, on the contrary, the thought of Chrysis being a *gametē hetaira* is an outrage (*Sam.* 130).

⁴³ The story of Glycerium's Athenian origins (220–4) is craftily left hanging in the balance by Terence: those among the Roman audience familiar with Apollodoros'

outrageous defiance of legal and moral custom (*praeter civium | morem atque legem et sui voluntatem patris*, *And.* 879–80). To what extent and in what manner this glaringly unconventional, potentially subversive behaviour could coalesce with the image of perfection that the *panchrēstos* would attach to Pamphilus of *Andria*, if indeed, as I submit, he was played with his mask, will be discussed below.

The perfect face of irony

To summarise the argument so far: the three young men we are discussing here are older and much more independent than the average young man of New Comedy; they are enjoying a reputation, or have constructed a self-image of moral accomplishment, attained after a significant period of time in which they were tested in the social arena; one way or another, they have (or feel that they have) already crossed the decisive boundary from *adulescentia* to married life, which for the common representative of the genus Youth comes only at the conclusion of the plot, not the beginning; therefore, the ownership they take of their lives is much greater, as much as their lapses are judged with matching severity (by others as well as by themselves), as in the case of Charisios.

In effect, of course, none of these special young men is truly leading the life of a married *paterfamilias*: all three of them are living in limbo between adulthood and adolescence. Charisios and Pamphilus of *Hecyra* are officially married, and yet they have been estranged from their wives before consummating the marriage. Both go back to whoring for a short while, but in both their cases this regression is incomplete and full of remorse.⁴⁴

Epidikazomenos, which Terence would later adapt in his *Phormio* (*Andria* was produced in 166 BC, *Phormio* in 161), would know that such a story could well be a sham, a *fallacia*, or, more piquantly, a *fabula*. They would also know, nonetheless, that lovers do not usually initiate intrigues by themselves; plus, the fact that it is Davus, the master-plotter, who discounts their story, speaks in favour of its authenticity.

⁴⁴ In a significant new papyrus scrap of the *Epitrepontes*, Smikrines imagines Charisios to exclaim: . . .] λέγοντ' ἄσωτός εἰμ', οὐ[. . .] στα, μεθύω, κραπαλῶ, (POxy 4461, ll. 7–8 Nünlist). 'It is noteworthy', comments René Nünlist (2003: 26), 'that Smikrines does not envisage a belligerent Charisios.' That Charisios would react this way, admitting guilt with no argument, may be Smikrines' wishful thinking, but that the youth was half-hearted in his revelries is beyond doubt.

Habrotonon's complaint that she has remained *hagnē gamōn* to the extent of qualifying to be a *kanēphoros* (*Epitr.* 430ff.) is most evocative of this oxymoron. Even more paradoxically, Pamphilus of *Hecyra* discovered the value of a wife in the arms of a *hetaira* (!), as Bacchis' mercenary behaviour throws the moral superiority of Philumena into relief. Despite that, he will not take his wife back; hence, he dithers between the *oikos* and the *bacchanal* finding his place nowhere. Pamphilus of *Andria*, too, never loses sight of what his behaviour imperils, insomuch as the principles to which he so stubbornly adheres are in stark variance with the wishes of his father and the exigencies of the state.

The situation of all three youths, as they are oscillating between the condition of civic marriage and responsibility and a life 'in their own personal terms' (*suo modo*), is highly paradoxical. All feel this paradox to their bones, yet none of them is willing to give way; all of them stick to their reactionary guns with marked intransigence – paradoxically, again, not out of mere selfishness or due to any deliberative inefficiency, but insisting on what can be generally understood to be a principled, if obstinate, position. Based on the little they know, all three are making a conscious moral decision from which they refuse adamantly to waver; and certainly, in making that decision, all three – and this is most momentous in the irony it entails – are defending values of Greco-Roman patriarchy, which indeed they have internalised fully: the common patriarchal aversion to illegitimacy or the equally common obligation of *fides*. Pamphilus of *Andria* would rather risk it all than break his promises to Chrysis and Glycerium. Charisios and Pamphilus of *Hecyra* will not go back to their wives and their *nothoi* no matter the cost. Charisios continues to carouse in the most extravagant manner, while Pamphilus is willing to jeopardise the reputation of two respectable *matronae*, his mother and his mother-in-law, as long as he is not forced to take up what he thinks is another man's baby.

Certain stubbornness, high-mindedness, or even arrogance (*hypsēlophrosynē*) is certainly in evidence in all three of these youths. In the case of Charisios, the accusation of *hypsēlophrosynē* comes up twice: first, in the mouth of Smikrines, who thinks

that the young man must be *hypsēlos*, if he is trying to get away with both whoring and marriage (*Epitr.* 693ff.); and then it resurfaces, even more painfully, in the mouth of Charisios himself in a moment of vehement self-contempt (*Epitr.* 922). Pamphilus of *Hecyra*, too, faces the accusation of obstinacy (*percontumax*) and *hypsēlophrosynē* (*sublati animi*) from his own father in law (*Hec.* 504–7):

Ph. *percontumax redisti huc nobis, Pamphile.*

...

*quia paullum vobis accessit pecuniae,
sublati animi sunt.*

PH. Stubborn, aren't you, Pamphilus, now that you are back . . . You are putting on airs, because you and your family have come into a little bit of money.

It is suggestive of the multiple systemic deficiencies unmasked here that, contrary to what Phidippus wants to believe, Pamphilus' behaviour has nothing to do with any accretion to his family's fortunes (and thus with a selfish hope of a better marital settlement) and everything to do with the ideological imperative of the purity of the household. *Hypsēlophrosynē*, we saw, is encoded on the *panchrēstos*' raised eyebrows: the *panchrēstos* is literally a highbrow mask, and this is the only potential blemish in its image of perfection; yet if the mask is indeed ascribed to such characters as Charisios or Terence's two Pamphili, the dramatic *tour de force* is to determine where the blemish truly comes from – and what must be stressed with emphasis is that in each single case the moral flaw does not seem to lie with the individual so much as with a whole ideological system this individual is doing nothing but to uphold.

I hope the reader is by now convinced that the three youths analysed in this chapter are involved in a narrative pattern that by New Comedy standards is as singular as the *panchrēstos* is a unique, liminal mask; and that the *Sinnbezirk* of the *panchrēstos*, as defined in the first section of this chapter, squares well enough with their exceptional situation to allow the hypothesis that this mask would enhance their ironic depth in a very effective way. It is on these ironies that I shall dwell in the

remainder of this section, asking the reader to imagine the powerful synergy that would be produced between *logos* and *opsis*, if Charisios and the two Pamphili are indeed sporting the *panchrēstos*.

These youths, I argue, represent three different versions of ‘perfection’. Ironically, all three of them pose a severe threat to the civic system that fosters them by virtue of being, precisely, ‘perfect’ products of that system; they expose cracks in the very foundation of patriarchy by keeping closely and intractably to the principles that underpin it. Charisios throws the comic universe into maelstrom, because his perfection, which he measures against the supposed shortcomings of his truly blameless wife, proves to have been partial to his own terrible faults. It has also been indicative, as David Konstan (1995) and Susan Lape (2004) have shown best of all, of an awkward moral double standard at the core of polis ideology. The two Pamphili also, even the Pamphilus of *Hecyra*, whom modern scholars love to hate, become problematic, because each in his own way is also too perfect; each in his own way clings too obstinately to the very values and qualities that would otherwise ensure their rightful place in the society of men. If indeed Charisios and the two Pamphili are wearing the *panchrēstos*, their tricky ‘perfection’ is clamorously flaunted to the audience by the mask, while it is being variously problematised.

Charisios’ ‘crisis of consciousness’ breaks out violently in Act iv of the *Epitrepontes*, when the skeletons in his own closet come rushing out (although he still thinks that his νόθος is from Habrotonon) at the same time that Pamphile’s devotion is established beyond any reasonable doubt. The realisation that his austere denunciation of Pamphile was horribly blind to his own murky past throws Charisios into deep and heartfelt despair. His speech in *Epitr.* 908–31, which comes after a long introductory rhesis by Onesimos detailing his master’s manic reaction after eavesdropping on Pamphile’s exchange with her father, is one of the most moving and, from the limited point of view of the character, one of the most genuinely ‘tragic’ moments in the Menander we know.

In the wake of David Konstan's work⁴⁵ few scholars still doubt that Charisios is not equating himself to Pamphile inasmuch as both have had premarital intercourse,⁴⁶ but inasmuch as that experience has produced a bastard child. Charisios' equation of the raped Pamphile's 'misfortune' (*atykhēma*) to his own is not a bigoted equation of victim and aggressor: it makes sense with reference to the public protocol and the patriarchal values which Charisios had been extremely careful to uphold throughout his life and of which now he discovers himself to have been in very serious breach. Charisios' 'perfection', his supposedly faultless moral record and his incessant preoccupation with telling right from wrong, made him *hēpsylophrōn* – and merciless as a result. Seeing the error of his ways, Charisios experiences that cleansing enlightenment that tragic heroes acquire moments before their deaths.⁴⁷

Yet it is seriously misleading to compare Charisios' speech with genuine confessions of error like Knemon's or pleading apologies like Polemon's, because, from his own narrow viewpoint, Charisios in *Epitr.* 908ff. suffers something much more devastating than a bruise on his ego; something much more overwhelming than simple remorse caused by Pamphile's generosity of spirit. This is Menander's 'perspectivism' once again, that loaded interplay between an external (audience/comic) and an internal (character/'tragic') point of view. Charisios is not delivering the average Menandrian *apologia pro vita sua*, in which the character avows to change his ways hoping to be rehabilitated, forgiven or excused. In fact, from his own perspective, he is uttering a desperate and authentically 'tragic' cry, less reminiscent of those salutary Menandrian moments of regret and more of those scenes in tragedy where the character eventually sees the light, but it is now, regrettably, only too late (the motif of 'late learning', *gnōsis methysteros*).⁴⁸ As far as Charisios knows, the game is over: Pamphile cannot possibly be restored to him. He is well

⁴⁵ Konstan (1995: 141–52).

⁴⁶ For the traditional view, see, e.g., Steinhagen (1910); Fossatoro (1915).

⁴⁷ Cf. Furley (2009: 233).

⁴⁸ On the motif of late learning in tragedy, see Whitman (1966: 103–21).

aware that any attempt at reconciliation must break down Smikrines' opposition; and from what he has overheard, the fact that he, too, has a bastard child has made such a concession on the part of Pamphile's father anything but forthcoming. Charisios' imagined confrontation of Smikrines in *Epitr.* 928–32 is a flight of fancy. His outburst, then, is not a simple 'crisis of consciousness': from his subjective position, it has a much more sinister, practical side.

Little doubt is left in the play that Smikrines retains the legal right to dissolve his daughter's marriage⁴⁹ by decrying Charisios' disruptive conduct – and this is when the issue of *atychein* enters the fray. Charisios' *atychēma* is usually given an exclusively past reference: but *ētychēka*, which can mean, 'I have been proven unlucky', but also 'I have failed' (cf. Ar. *Nu.* 427), can refer to the future of this household as much as to its past. *Ētychēka* may well point to the impossibility of Charisios ever taking back *hoian gynaike*, because to do so it would not be enough for him to accept her illegitimate progeny; it would also require others to write off his own inexcusable trespasses. Charisios knows only too well that the potential survival of his marriage is no longer in his own two hands. Even if he were willing to fly in the face of the *mores civium*, like Pamphilus does in the *Andria*, and excuse or even recognise Pamphile's *nothos*, his own transgression, hopelessly unpalatable to Smikrines if not to his wife, would forever stand in the way. Charisios' re-evaluation of Pamphile, his

⁴⁹ Whether Athenian fathers actually had this right of *aphairesis*, the authority to dissolve a marriage without the consent of their daughters or their husbands, is a complex problem of legal history. Although the evidence is inconclusive (see Cohn-Haft 1995: 2), scholars generally believe, mostly on the strength of Dem. 41.4, that *aphairesis* was, at least in theory, as common a form of divorce as *apopempsis* (divorce initiated by the husband) or *apoleipsis* (divorce initiated by the wife): see Erdmann (1934: 384–403); Wolff (1944: 46–51); A. R. W. Harrison (1968: 30–2); MacDowell (1978: 88); Todd (1993: 214–15); Cohn-Haft (1995). Rosivach (1984), on the contrary, expresses scepticism as to whether *aphairesis* was a legally asserted right or even a technical term. The sceptics usually dismiss the New Comedy evidence (especially the *Stichus*) as irrelevant to actual legal practice or consider it as evidence of divorce initiated by the wife (especially the *Epitrepontes*, where Smikrines is supposed to be trying to persuade his daughter to initiate the divorce herself). The authority of the father, however, in the *Epitrepontes* is beyond dispute: he can, if he wants to, behave like a *despotēs* and this is all that matters. As to Charisios' ability to react, Cohn-Haft (1995: 7) is clear: 'In the *Epitrepontes* and the *Stichus* the husbands are not currently living at home, so they are in no position to assert their powers over a wife or in any other way dispute the proposed action.'

willingness to grant a belated *syggnomēs meros* and accept her back is, always from the youth's own limited angle, a non-starter.⁵⁰ He, the 'good man', who is not just *chrēstos* but *panchrēstos*, constantly mindful of his own reputation (*doxa*) and foolish enough to overlook the blotches on his own coat, has brought his household to the brink of an almost irreversible crisis by his *hypsēlophrosynē* and *megala physan* (*Epitr.* 913).

The critical irony, of course, is that, despite Charisios' crashing self-accusations and Onesimos' reproof of Smikrines' supposedly covetous motives, neither of the two husbands, for all their personal failings, truly overstepped the confines of patriarchal civic ideology. Both did what they had to do under the circumstances. To accept a *nothos* was as unimaginable as to consent to one's daughter staying together with a practically bigamous man who squanders the family fortune. The boundaries between personal and systemic failure in this nasty business are blurry.

David Konstan insinuates that Charisios' condemnation of the dogmas of patriarchy in his speech is transient, made 'in the heat of the moment'.⁵¹ I counter that it is all the more momentous and impressive for that, since the character is convinced of an inevitable doom caused by that dogmatism exactly. Charisios' uncompromising and supercilious investment in civic 'perfection' proved much more pernicious than common youthful *akrasia*, and as far as he can see, there is no remedy. Both Charisios and Smikrines push things almost to the point of no return, because they remain too steeped in patriarchal ethics; they entertain the fallacy that both they, and the moral and ideological system that defines them, are free of blame; and they exercise the mandates of that system to the extreme.

Significantly, this sense of stiff moralism as both a personal and a systemic flaw is punctuated intertextually in Charisios' speech through a reference to Euripides' *Orestes* (*Epitr.* 910 ~ *Eur. Or.*

⁵⁰ Tyche, of course, has already intervened: in the immediately preceding scene, Habrotonon had recognised Pamphile as the child's mother (*Epitr.* 853–77).

⁵¹ Konstan (1995: 152): 'Perception of the identity between male and female responsibility in the bearing of the *nothos* poses a utopian challenge to the gender codes of the city state', even if Charisios' transcendence of the common ideological inhibitions takes place 'in the heat of the moment'.

922: ἀκέραιος, ἀνεπίπληκτον ἡσκηκῶς βίον). Menander once again (the other occasion is *Sik.* 176ff.) recalls, with much subversive wit this time, the messenger speech relating the assembly in Argos, which decided the fate of Orestes and Electra. I doubt that the point of this allusion is merely to introduce ‘the theme of madness brought on by crime’,⁵² because the words of the Euripidean messenger do not refer to Orestes, but to the supposedly blameless Farmer. Charisios associates himself with a paragon of virtue and righteousness, a handsome and manly figure, who a lived a life beyond reproach away from the rabble of the agora (*Or.* 917–22); yet, ironically, this is exactly what makes his allusion self-deprecatory.

To the Messenger’s biased mind⁵³ the austere *autourgos*, who defends Orestes, plays God to the Demagogue’s Satan, as the latter is the obsequious mouthpiece of Tyndareos (*Or.* 915). The messenger styles himself indirectly as one of the *chrēstoi* (*Or.* 930), who appreciated the farmer’s sense of justice. The farmer, he implies, is the voice of the *χρηστοί*. Yet, as modern scholarship has shown, the ‘anachronistic old farmer’,⁵⁴ himself a distorted reflection of his counterpart in Euripides’ *Electra*,⁵⁵ encapsulates just as much as the demagogue the moral shortcomings of the debate in *Orestes*,⁵⁶ by way of a moral stance and a proposition no less partial and extreme than his adversary’s: not to condemn Orestes to death, but instead to crown him ‘for having killed an evil and godless woman’, who violated the sanctity of marriage (*Or.* 923–9). The unqualified condemnation of the demagogue and the ‘effusive eulogy’⁵⁷ of the *autourgos* are products of the Messenger’s own prejudices. In fact, as a model of rhetoric and justice, the farmer is no less intemperate than the demagogue, no less out of order in this travesty of democratic procedure than his antagonist. In the *Orestes* intertext the clash is between extremes. By equating himself with one of

⁵² Furley (2009: 234–5).

⁵³ On the tragic Messenger and his subjective focalisation, which may not annul his facts, but it does qualify his frame, see de Jong (1991: 63ff.).

⁵⁴ Zeitlin (2003: 328). ⁵⁵ Zeitlin (2003: 328, n. 36).

⁵⁶ For this impasse, see Lloyd (1992: 127–9). ⁵⁷ Willink (1986: 234).

those extremes, the *autourgos*, Charisios is seriously undercutting the moral value of his past obdurate uprightness.

There is no love lost between Pamphilus of *Hecyra* and modern scholars, who call him every name in the book: from a 'distraught incompetent' and 'innately indecisive',⁵⁸ to an irresponsible fool, who, being 'entangled by his willingness to accept whatever sacrifice others are prepared to make for him ... forfeits his last chance to win our compassion'.⁵⁹ Pamphilus is also lambasted for the mockery he makes of *amor* by denouncing it as readily as he does, and for the fact that he suffers no real inconvenience in the end: unlike Charisios, scholars argue, Pamphilus owns up to nothing. Even more seriously, he is considered 'a subtle and dubious manipulator of the moral tradition',⁶⁰ as he distorts the idea of *pietas* to procure himself an exit from an uncomfortable fix.

This is not a balanced verdict, however, in my view. We cannot disregard, for example, Pamphilus' sincere willingness and earnest effort to rescue his wife from irrevocable social denigration: that he could not find a better public argument for divorce than *pietas* to his mother is the comic spice of the situation. And, of course, it is only partially true that Pamphilus suffers no consequences for his actions. If one is referring to the eventual happy ending, fair enough, but this is true of any youth. It is correct that Pamphilus does not experience a 'crisis of consciousness' as brutally upsetting as Charisios'. Along the way to the happy outcome, though, Pamphilus is forced to succumb to a necessity that is beyond him. We cannot write off Pamphilus' genuine angst at having to eradicate love from his soul two times over, each time because a superior duty calls: this is no cakewalk, but hard, painful work (*opera*), cf. *Hec.* 405–8:

lacrumo quae posthac futurast vita quom in mentem venit
solitudoque.⁶¹ o fortuna, ut numquam perpetuo's data!
Sed iam prior amor me ad hanc rem exercitatum reddidit,
quem ego tum consilio missum feci: idem huic operam dabo.

⁵⁸ McGarrity (1980–1). ⁵⁹ Goldberg (1986: 151, 152). ⁶⁰ Konstan (1983a: 140).

⁶¹ It is telling that John Sargeant, the old Loeb editor, takes these words to refer to Philumena's solitude, whereas Barsby takes them to mean Pamphilus'.

A few good men

I weep when I bring to mind what kind of a life, what solitude lies ahead for her. O Fortune, how it is that you are never given forever! But I am already trained for that thing by the love that I decided to let go then: I will do everything in my power to do the same now.

Above all, it is this necessity and Pamphilus' reaction to it that cannot be nullified, namely, the existence of a child that, for all anybody knows until the anagnorisis, is a *nothos*. Any temptation to condemn Pamphilus of *Hecyra* for his moral choices should first bear in mind the fundamental similarity of his situation and Charisios', inasmuch as both respond – clumsily, it is true – to an impossible societal pressure. Pamphilus' 'traditional values', writes Goldberg disapprovingly,⁶² prevent him from taking Philumena back. These values, however, are not inane and they are certainly not idiosyncratic; they encapsulate nothing else but the duty of a *paterfamilias* to ensure the birth of legitimate offspring. Pamphilus' stance is directly reminiscent not only of Charisios, but also of Demeas (*Samia*), a fully-grown citizen, who finds the idea of raising his own *nothos* abhorrent, although he had no qualms adopting someone else's son. The ethics of situations like Charisios', Pamphilus' or Demeas' eventually turn on the common Greek male anxiety over illegitimacy, an anxiety whose egotism is substantially overshadowed by cultural and legal concerns.⁶³ Problematic and nearly fatal for the *oikos* as it is, Pamphilus' stance in *Hecyra* is, strictly speaking, once again, as in the case of Charisios and Smikrines, the 'right' one. His decision to dismiss Philumena, but preserve her dignity and good name, saves both their chances to remarry respectably in the future. In a provocative sense, Pamphilus' position is much more 'responsible' and 'adult' than his namesake's in the *Andria*, who will stick to his unsanctioned relationship and to his illegitimate son no matter what. It is obvious that the roots of the problem run deeper.

Konstan speaks disparagingly of Pamphilus' 'domitable passion',⁶⁴ in the sense that *amor* in Pamphilus of *Hecyra* can be quietened down, checked, even eradicated through the exercise of logical control; it lacks the powerful, irresistible potency it has in

⁶² Goldberg (1986). ⁶³ On this, see further in Cole (2004: 146–77).

⁶⁴ Konstan (1983a: 137).

other youths. But this ability to control *pathos* with reason is nothing if not the quintessence of moral maturity, as defined by the hegemonic patriarchal discourse. Pamphilus' passion may be domitable not so much because he is knavish, but because he has come a long way towards civic maturation, according to which observance of social protocol, as well as the preservation of personal *fama* or *timē*, is for an adult male more important than passion, more important even than the feelings of a beloved mother and a respected mother-in-law. Pamphilus is a citizen son, who has achieved civic accomplishment, insomuch as he is able to control his erotic desires and make civically sanctioned moral choices: first, abandoning a courtesan for a wife; then recognising, albeit with delay, his citizen wife's superiority of *ingenium* over said courtesan; but eventually deciding to forfeit a loving marital relationship that would lead to civic dishonour in favour of a future, more stable (if probably less loving) arrangement. Yet, ironically so, if one judges by the horrifying prospects this stance creates for the *oikos* and the child, the fact that Pamphilus has achieved the moral maturity to make these choices, in other words, the fact that he is civically and morally adept to behave like a *paterfamilias* rather than a lover, far from perpetuating his *oikos*, threatens to demolish it. The price almost paid for wiping the stains off the *fama* of Philumena and himself was none other than the exposition of a legitimate child, the supreme token of the *oikos*' continuance, a child of his very own. Once again, in the same wonderfully ironic vein, a young man becomes problematic and destabilises the system that has fostered him, because he has internalised only too well the prejudicial morality of patriarchy; in other words because he has become too perfect.

Revealing the details of the story, Pamphilus says in the end, will serve no one. This is not imprecise, but Pamphilus still needs to answer for his complete failure to achieve any kind of introspection after the event, his inability to take stock of his personal history. But this fact exactly may well be the most subtle, most caustic dig at patriarchy in the whole play. Intertextuality plays its humorous part once again. Pamphilus' reluctance to look back critically at his own actions is underscored by a 'system reference' in the denouement of the play, an ironic (and well hidden beneath

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a mundane metaphor) allusion to the prerogative of (tragic) gods to enjoy their predatory sexual jaunts with complete and utter impunity (*Hec.* 841–3):

- (PAM) Vide, mi Parmeno, etiam sodes, ut mihi haec certa et clara attuleris,
ne me in breve conicias tempus gaudio hoc falso frui.
(PAR) Visum est.
(PAM) Certen?
(PAR) Certe.
(PAM) deus sum, si hoc ita est.
(PAR) Verum reperies.
(PAM) Please, Parmeno, make sure, if you would be so kind, that the news
you relate is certain and definite, otherwise you bring me
momentary and unsubstantiated joy.
(PAR) I have made sure.
(PAM) It is certain then?
(PAR) It is certain.
(PAM) I am a god, if this is so!
(PAM) You will find this to be true!

Pamphilus *the god*, like Chaerea in the *Eunuchus*, has not only been ‘freed from the consequences of his own actions’;⁶⁵ he has also been given authority to whitewash any remorse. But in Terence, as much as in Menander, this leaves behind a bittersweet aftertaste. Few other plays of New Comedy present the male sex as uniformly and as unremittingly hopeless as the *Hecyra*. The males in *Hecyra* share a fantasy of perfection, which, unlike the *Epitrepointes*, is preserved obstinately to the end against the odds and against the facts. Suggestively, the two old fathers remain completely in the dark even after the anagnorisis. They learn nothing of the truth, continuing to believe that the whole mess was the result of petty female squabbles. Phidippus and Laches are charitably allowed to linger in their happy little patriarchal wonderland.

If one can put a measure on irony, Pamphilus of *Andria* is arguably the most biting of the three youths examined in this chapter. His behaviour is consciously and unabashedly anything but ‘perfect’, civically blameless; yet he is the most genuinely,

⁶⁵ Slater (1987–8: 257–8).

most literally *panchrēstos*, morally blameless, of them all. He remains truly above any moral blame (he commits none of the violent, hubristic actions of his two peers and he stays clear of his coterie's promiscuous womanising). Mostly, though, it is his steadfast adherence to a consciously reactionary course of moral action (to conduct *res uxoria* with a *peregrina* and to raise a bastard child) that at the end of this play *saves* the polis (and patriarchy) from its own self.

From the start this distinctive young man makes it clear that he has no intention whatsoever of committing to a citizen marriage, for all the theatrics: the only reason he goes along with Davus' intrigue is the hope that *interea aliquid acciderit boni* (*And.* 398), a delightful metatheatrical irony. On the contrary, he is unfaltering in his decision to honour his commitment towards Pasibula (Glycerium), her deceased guardian and, of course, towards the illegitimate child he has begotten with the young girl of Andros.

Pamphilus is truly *panchrēstos* in every sense of the term but the civic. His belief that his beloved is Athenian is as firm as it is baseless, and his decision to transform an unsanctioned union into a quasi-marriage arrangement with a metic courtesan is practically transgressive. Yet to the eyes of Pamphilus, if on the strength of little more than his 'immense confidence' in her (*ingens confidentia*, *And.* 876), Glycerium was hardly ever anyone else than Pasibula. It is precisely this decision to stay with his quasi-wedded companion, underscored to full effect by a pattern of behaviour that befits a citizen husband (observance of *fides*, *pietas*, *pudor* and duty – the whole nine yards of the Roman *mos maiorum*), which buys the time needed for Comedy to work her magic.

As mentioned previously, if anywhere recognition was a superfluous *a posteriori* endorsement of an accomplished event, it is in the *Andria*. Pamphilus treated Pasibula as an Athenian and as a wife from the start (that he appears to ponder leaving her in *And.* 896ff. is a rhetorical simulation rendered risk-free by the strength of Crito's evidence). His unswerving refusal to give in to social pressure undoes the shortcomings of the civic system: it dilates and undercuts the patriarchal social norm simultaneously. The eventual accommodation of this self-legitimised union by the norms of the state sounds almost irrelevant, an afterthought meant

to allay embarrassment. In the end, it is the polis that expands to humour Pamphilus, not Pamphilus who fits himself into the polis.

Pamphilus tells the story of a perfection that is so genuinely complete that almost inevitably it is at variance with the imperfections of social structure. Terry McGarrity (1978) gave one of the most sensitive accounts of Pamphilus' character.⁶⁶ McGarrity's most salient point is that the father-son conflict in the *Andria* derives from the fact that the participants have common rather than conflicting interests. Simo raised Pamphilus on the ideal of *libertas* as responsibility, which entails 'the taking of an honourable wife and becoming a father'.⁶⁷ In no way does Pamphilus behave contrary to this ideal in the play, only the upshots of the youth's steadfastness are stunning. The irony with Pamphilus, I submit, is that he becomes subversive of the norm precisely by being reluctant to compromise, even in the face of excommunication, what for him is the quintessence of *liberius vivere*, therefore the core of being a citizen: *fides* and *pudor* (*aidōs*). Pamphilus threatens to commit a virtual moral coup d'état because his sense of duty is greater than his 'realism'. By declining to accept the polis in its practical, cynical exclusivity, Pamphilus jeopardises what he refuses to adulterate. Pamphilus is the perfect product of a perfect upbringing; only he has to fit in a narrow, hence imperfect, societal cast. What happens when the polis is not as 'perfect' as the 'perfect' characters the polis has produced? This is one more of those 'erased' questions in New Comedy: the irony with Pamphilus is that in the context of patriarchal ideology his undiluted 'perfection' becomes almost synonymous with transgression.

Conclusion

There should be no need for lengthy conclusions. The three young men analysed in this chapter embody, each one in his particular manner, what we can call the ironic 'politics of perfection' in the context of a democratic polis culture. The possibility that they were played with the paradoxical *panchrēstos* mask, which just as

⁶⁶ McGarrity (1978).

⁶⁷ McGarrity (1978: 104).

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ironically signified moral accomplishment in its own right, is beyond definitive, 'archaeological' proof. Still, as was this book's main tenet, *opsis*, with its tightening grip on theatrical and other audiences from the end of the fifth century onwards, and its new-found ability to converse allusively and on a minute level with artistic, literary and other cultural paradigms, which was the result of an overall cultural awakening to the intricacies of spectacle, of parallel developments in the plastic arts, and of a significant degree of hybridisation that transfused much of the tragic code into New Comedy, is integral to characterisation, theme and ideology in Menandrian plays. Therefore, to try even provisionally to re-establish the mask and 'intervisual' semiotics at the core of New Comedy performance analysis is of exceptional value for understanding the theatrical essence of Menander. Appreciation of the subtle allusivity of *opsis* and especially the novel kind of theatrical mask at Menander's disposal can go a long way to ascertaining the ideological depth as well as the shrewd artistry that lies behind the unassuming exterior of Menander's bourgeois world.

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